













**DRYDEN'S**

**ABSALOM  
AND  
ACHITOPHEL**



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## The Age of Dryden

The period between 1660 and 1700 is generally known as the Restoration Age or the Age of Dryden. "The Age of Dryden" is an expression as appropriate as any description of a literary period by the name of a single writer can be. Dryden is the most conspicuous personality in that chapter of history which covers the last four decades of the seventeenth century. He assumed, 'as if by right divine,' leadership of almost all the important literary movements of this period. There are many great men of letters who have illustrated English literature from the beginning to the present day, yet it can be safely said that no one so represented his time and so influenced it as Dryden did during the last twenty years of the seventeenth century. His intellectual and artistic superiority to his contemporaries is remarkable. Excepting Voltaire great men of letters have usually represented only a small part of their time. With Dryden this was not the case. The majority of literary Englishmen, both his contemporaries and successors, not only directly imitated him, but also worked on the same lines and pursued the same objects. Prof. Saintsbury has remarked: "The eighteen volumes of his works contain a faithful representation of the whole literary movement in England for the best part of half a century, and what is more, they contain the germs and indicate the direction of almost the whole literary movement for nearly a century more." Yet the term "The Age of Dryden" is a misnomer. It has been pointed out by critics, again and again, that Dryden, of all great English writers and poets, was the least original. He was least capable of inspiring his generation with new ideas as is commonly expected from the representative poet of the age. He could not discover for it new sources of emotion, nor could he produce for the coming generation new artistic forms as the media of literary expression. But the charges are more or less baseless and are based on flimsy grounds. He imparted a vigour and virility to the main currents of thought and feeling of the time and

by their resourceful treatment by his master-hand gave a recognisable status to many a literary and artistic form. In this connection A. W. Ward has remarked: "Many currents of thought and feeling suggested to him by his age were supplied by the power of his genius with an impetus of unprecedented strength, more than one literary form offering itself for his use at an inchaote, or at a relatively advanced, stage of development owed the recognition which it seemed to the resourceful treatment of it by his master hand.\*" No writer, howsoever great a genius, can do something creditable without opportunities; yet the age and opportunities alone cannot make a man a great writer. Whether Dryden was indebted to opportunities given to him by his times or to his own genius, for the great bulk of literary production is such a controversial point as cannot be settled even after volumes of words. However there cannot be any doubt that Dryden's literary achievements cannot be properly appreciated apart from the influences of his age. We cannot also make any judgment of literary production without taking into consideration Dryden's contributions to it. So it is in the fitness of things to call the literary period between 1660 and 1700 the Age of Dryden because it was Dryden who symbolised the aspirations and achievements of the last forty years of the seventeenth century; it was Dryden who symbolically represented the distinctive merits and defects of the Restoration Age; it was Dryden, who was the acknowledged leader of almost all the literary movements of his time, it was Dryden who incarnated the spirit of Restoration life and literature; it was Dryden, and he alone, who spoke, not only for his age but for all time, as the acknowledged leader both in poetry and criticism.

### The Spirit of the Age

**I. Neo—Agustanism or Neo—classicism:** In May 1660, invited by Parliament, King Charles II returned from exile and the restoration of monarchy in England became a fact. Amidst the spontaneous outburst of joy, poets and others

\* *The Cambridge History of English Literature (Vol. VIII)*

were not slow in asserting a parallel between the Restoration of Charles II and imperial establishment of Octavius Caesar, the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar, in Rome, in 31 B. C. This attitude of mind is implicitly expressed in Dryden's poem, "Astraea Redux" which he composed for the occasion, and quite explicitly expressed in the concluding lines of the same poem :

*Oh Happy Age ! oh times like those alone,  
By Fate reserved for great Augustus' Throne !  
When the joint growth of Arms and Arts forshew  
The world a monarch, and that monarch you.*

The author of the preface to "The Second Part of Mr. Waller's Poems" said in a more magisterial and authoritative manner : "I question whether in Charles the Second's Reign, English did not come to its full perfection, and whether it has not had its Augustan Age, as well as the Latin." This neo-Augustanism is also called neo-classicism. It implies a veneration for the Roman classics, thought and way of life. It attaches a great value to the noble Roman Tone. The authors of this period thought themselves to have resemblance to the Roman poets of the golden age of Latin poetry. They saw themselves as a second Virgil, a second Ovid or Horace, and they believed that their relation to the big world and their assured position in Society heightened the resemblance. They tried to form their poetry on the lines laid down in the critical works of the Augustan age as elaborated and interpreted in Renaissance Criticism. All of them assumed and even asserted that the kinds and modes of treatment, even minor details such as figures of speech and use of epithets were once for all settled by the ancients. They also thought that they had the temper of the Augustan time, displayed in the works of Horace, Ovid and Virgil; "its urbanity, its love of good sense and moderation, its instinctive distrust of emotion, and its invincible good breeding." The stately enthusiasm of the time Dryden caught in retrospect when he wrote his "Threnonia Augustalis" in 1685 :



*Men meet each other with erected look,  
The steps were higher than they took;  
Friends to Congratulate their friends made haste,  
And long inveterate foes saluted as they passed."*

The dignity and stateliness outlived the enthusiasm. But the new Augustus, Charles the Second, proved to be both lazy and lecherous, and in spite of his undoubted wit and intelligence disillusionment soon attended his reign. The attitude has been summed up by Samuel Pepys.

"It is strange.....every body do now-a-days reflect upon Oliver, and commend him what brave things he did, and made all the neighbour princes fear him; while here a prince, come in with all the love and prayers and good liking of his people, who have given greater signs of loyalty and willingness to serve him with their estates than ever was done by any people, hath lost so soon, that it is a miracle what way a man could devise to lose so much in so little time."

**II. The Court and French Influence:** Charles the Second had brought back from his Continental exile the love of French wit, gallantry, elegance and artistic deftness. It is very curious to note that the Restoration writers were equally influenced by Roman stateliness and French refinement. Though Roman writers, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Ovid and Juvenal meant more to the literate English gentlemen of this period than his French Contemporaries, Descartes, Moliere, Corneille and Boileau, yet it would be quite wrong to under-estimate the French influence. "But the necessary social, economic and religious readjustments crowded in upon the minds of men; their realistic, common sense, and at times even cynical evaluation of life was at wide variance from Roman stateliness and French refinement. The spirit of the age was far from unified, and in re-action against its complexity Restoration intellectuals thirsted for a rational simplification of their existence." It is essential that we have some awareness of their thinking in the fields of science, religion, and politics, as well as their tendencies in the arts, so that we may understand their divergent efforts to reduce confusion to a lucid simplicity.

(III) **The influence of Science :** The Royal Society, an organization dedicated to scientific research, emerged in 1660 from the group of intellectuals who used to meet in London at Gresham College or in Oxford at Wadham. The achievements of the Society lie chiefly in the field of mathematics as applied to the motion of heavenly bodies. It should not be supposed that this organization, though dedicated to scientific research, was opposed to the orthodox religion or had any subversive or eccentric end in view. Instead, it was designed to support religious orthodoxy. The leading fellows of society were devoutly religious and the work of Robert Boyle in Chemistry, of John Ray in natural Sciences, of Newton in mathematics and astronomy did nothing to subvert religious faith and belief. Apart from their great scientific achievements, their work is significant because it popularised certain methods of thinking and writing. The motto of the society *in illis in verba*—"on the word of no one"—is a direct challenge to historians who regard English neo-classicism as an appeal to the ancients as authorities. The Society adopted the experimental and empirical methods of knowledge, according to which nothing should be taken to be true without the experimental examination of evidence. The fellows of the society had no faith in a priori reasoning and they preached the necessity of having a sceptical or 'open' mind. According to the will of Robert Boyle, the society founded Boyle Lectures to prove the truth of Christian religion. The influence of these lectures, though indirect, was immense in furthering the physico-theology that was the answering challenge of the orthodox to certain types of deists. The chief purpose of the society was to substitute experiment for disputation for the realisation of truth. The method of knowledge, popularised by the Society, transferred attention from the pursuit of humane learning to the study of things.

The Royal society of London had a tremendous influence in reforming the English prose style and in improving and fixing standards of language. Among its fellows were literary men who had little interest in science. It was on account of these fellows that society promoted the study and reform of English prose style and was eager to improve and fix standards of language. In 1664 it appointed a committee,

with a view to improve the English language, whose members, among others, were Dryden, Evelyn, Waller, Sprat, Cowley, Villiers and the Duke of Buckingham. Though on account of the death of Cowley and the interruption caused by the plague of 1665, the committee could not formally report to the Society, yet its ideals of style became of very great importance. These ideals have been summarised by Bishop Sprat in his "History of the Royal Society".

"They ( The Society ) have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution the only Remedy that can be found for this *extravagance* and that has been a constant Resolution to reject all amplifications, digressions and swellings of style ; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men delivered so many *things* in almost equal number of *words*. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expression, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of Artizans, countrymen and Merchants, before that of wits and scholars."

These ideals, essential for scientific exposition, were accepted by writers. Hobbes urged upon the parsons the quality of *plainness* as opposed "First to *hard words* secondly, to *deep and mysterious notions* ; Thirdly to *affected* rhetorications ; and Fourthly to *Phantastical Phrases*."

**IV. Genteel Tolerance:** Under the influence of new science and the new methods of the acquisition of knowledge, the useful and the plain were replacing the ornate, the rich, the complex. Similar tendency to simplification was also found even in the religious thinking of the time. Certainly religious controversy was a main product of the prolific printing press, but gentlemen were becoming bored by such zeal. The religion of all true gentlemen was something that no true gentleman argued about. It was simply left to the parsons. Sir William Temple admired the effects of toleration of the Dutch people and, about their composure in religious controversy remarked in his "observations in the United Provinces" :

"They argue without interest or anger; They differ without enmity or scorn, and they agree without confederacy. Men live together like citizens of the world, associated by the common ties of humanity.... The power of religion among them, where it is, lies in every man's heart."

In England this beatific condition seemed more than a channel crossing distant, but remotely the ideal was perceived and valued as the coil of varied controversy incessantly renewed itself at home. Weary of disputation and eager for a simplified, reasonable creed of Dryden could write :

*Faith is not built on disquisitions Vain ;*

*The things we must believe are few and plain.*

But the majority of Englishmen did not follow Dryden's search for "unsuspected ancients" to serve as magisterial sanctions in faith. The age, in general, was prejudiced against any *ipso facto* authority.

**V. Religious animosities :** On account of religious controversy and disputations, various creeds of Christianity adopted a particular attitude towards religion and faith. They also came to be known for a particular stand, to which they insisted to stick. There were complicated positions taken. The Catholics, who were disliked more for political reasons than for doctrinal reasons were willing to undermine the authority of scripture, since by so doing they undermined the chief orthodox basis for Protestant faith. The Parsons still assailed Anglicans on questions of church government; but many dissenters and Anglicans, both largely Calvinists, would unite against the rising tide of Arminianism. In the forefront of its 1629 Protestation the House of Commons had asserted.

"Whosoever shall bring in innovation of religion, or by favour of Countenance seek to extend or introduce Popery or Arminianism or other opinion disagreeing from the true and orthodox Church shall be reputed a capital enemy to this kingdom and commonwealth." At the end of the century a kindlier attitude towards practical moral sanctions as opposed to the Calvinist covenant of grace would have made such a protest impossible. The blood and tears of war, controversy,

and political intrigue had led gradually to a practical, if not always a reasoned, spirit of toleration.

**(VI) The Quakers and Reason:** The people called quakers made many contributions to the civic life of the time, the chief being their insistent belief in religious toleration. Their chief contribution to religious life was their mystical emphasis on experience on the life of God in the soul of man. They held that ideal religion is a pleasant psychological state rather a terror-stricken argument. The members of the friendship society or Friends, as they were called, did a great deal, and very zealously, to promote religious experience among the people. they published an astonishing number of journals, autobiographies and histories, some of these were written by authors who were hardly literate. The most important among these publications was "Journal" (1694) written by George Fox, the Founder of the Society of Friends, \* whose introduction was written by William Penn. Penn himself was a very skilful writer for the Society and his "No cross No crown" and "Some fruits of Solitude" are effectively simple and fervent.

The theologian of the Society of Friends was Robert Barclay, whose "Apology for the 'True Christian Divinity'" represents Quaker logic at its best. The friends attached more importance to mystical sense of divine immanence than to reasoned theology. "Strong in their concept of 'the light of reason' which the orthodox insisted was uniform and universal, both Protestants and Catholics were bitterly scornful of the inner or private light so valued by the quakers and by some other sects and called by their enemies 'enthusiasm'. Subjectivity was antithetical to the ideal of constant and universal reason.

**VII Locke and his Empiricism:** John Locke (1632-1704) raised the most effective voice in favour of the sanction of common experience as opposed to the vagaries of enthusi-

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Member of Society of friends founded by George Fox in 1648 and devoted to peace principles, plainness of dress, simplicity of speech, and peculiar priestless religious meetings.

asm. His most important, rather the most important in the entire history of English philosophy, is his "Essay Concerning Human understanding". In the first three books of the "Essay" the author has endeavoured to demolish the theory of innate ideas, to define the true nature of ideas and to explain the relation between language and thought. In the last, which is probably the most important book of the "Essay" he has developed his theory of knowledge, which stated in simple terms, is that knowledge comes only from sense experience and from reflection upon that experience. He came to be regarded as the great empirical rationalist of modern philosophy and the father of the sceptical thinking of the succeeding century on account of his ability to write with clarity and order and on account of his use of the methods the New Science in philosophical thinking. He demonstrated the need of an historical revelation of religion; but his psychological approach to the relation of reason to faith ultimately weakened reason and strangled faith. Locke's influence on deistic thinking, on psychology, and on epistemology was to be enormous through out the eighteenth century.

**VIII. Political Controversies :** In the field of politics there was a great deal of confusion. English people felt a strong satisfaction that they were not born, like French people, to serve an absolute monarch like Louis XIV. Yet Sir Robert Filmer, who died in 1653, strongly defended absolutism and divine right of the king in his "Patriarcha" and other popular writings. Filmer said that a great deal of confusion emerged on account of conflicting parties and the parliaments, divided against themselves, and that the only refuge was to accept the divinely constituted authority of the monarch. Hobbes's "Leviathan" substituted for the divine sanction of sovereignty a materialistic absolutism based on an original compact that irrevocably delegated to one person power over the governed. Far from granting any religious or ecclesiastical sanction for sovereignty Hobbes made the church entirely the creature of the monarch. His absolutism, his materialism, his anti-clericalism and his irritatingly systematic thinking made Hobbes's doctrines the object of loud and continual anathemas throughout the period. Yet the fundamental purpose of his work was the gratification of a love for a settled peace.

In a period when Parliament established its control over the throne by inviting Charles the Second to return from his exile and William and Mary to displace James II, absolutism might be thought a dead issue. But it were the accession of James II and the continental set-backs to liberty, that stimulated Locke publish his great works, some of which were of supreme political importance. His views had long been formed, but, appearing at the troubled moment of Revolution 1688, they were its Cogent defence. A protege of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Locke was an intellectual Whig. He had long been fir toleration in religion; and his "two treatises of Government" was the best answer to the absolutism of Filmer and Hobbes. Locke's influence on constitutional theories both in England and America was destined to be enormous. He emphatically gave the legislative branch of government supreme power. The authority of the governor, he said, derived solely from the consent of the governed, and the bound of his power was the welfare of those governed by him.

**IX. Political Parties :** The government by Cabinet ministers had risen to power and become very remarkable on account of the laziness and lechery of Charles the Second. In the heat of sensational Popish Plot of 1678; there had appeared troublesome and irrational party labels, Whig and Tory. The Whigs claimed to protect the fundamental liberties of the people and they attempted to assist the dissenters. Tories, likely to be very ardent Churchmen, professed a devotion to royal prerogative and to the legitimate line of succession to the throne. The Whigs and Tories accused and counter-accused each other. The Tories accused the Whigs of being republicans, revolutionary, and disciples of Oliver Cromwell. The Whigs retaliated more unjustly after 1688 by calling the Tories the followers and supporters of deposed James II. The necessity of a protestant succession had provoked endless controversy, even revising notions of divine right which had to be abandoned upon the accession of William and Mary as joint rulers. The principle of allegiance and meaning of Oaths were topics of bitter dispute when, led by Sancroft the Archbishop of Canterbury, many Clerics refused to violate their allegiance already Sworn to James II by taking the

required Oaths of allegiance to the new rulers. Such Jacobites, followers of James II, were called non-jurors; and they included eminent literary scholars like George Hickes and Thomas Hearne; and the essayist and Critic Jeremy Collier.

**X. Social condition:** All this troubled activity of political religious and scientific unrest was, of course, primarily the concern of the upper class, especially of university men. Normally, after a period of varying length spent at either university the young gentleman travelled on the continent, and then returned to an active life in London or to a retired life in the Country. The Citizen and the Country squire are outstanding types of the period, frequently burlesqued in Comedy or in fiction. Men like John Evelyn and Sir William Temple loved the country and viewed eventual retirement there as a desired goal. Men like Samuel Pepys loved London and the amusements it and its environs afforded. As a whole, England must have presented an almost entirely rural aspect. London to be sure, was the completely dominant metropolis and contained some what less than two thirds of million inhabitants which would be about one-tenth of the country's whole population. There were the few big towns like Norwich, Bristol, Midland manufacturing towns, each having a population of ten to thirty thousand inhabitants. If we can believe Macaulay, the country squire was practically illiterate. In the Restoration comedies, on the other hand, a valet may be presented as about the most intelligent person in the play. Such pictures are not to be trusted. The classes at times were curiously scrambled. Unprivileged country folk frequently looked on London as a heavenly city; and it is certain that if the population of the island was rural, the arts were largely urban. In the literature of the period class demarcations were specially strong. The Restoration comedy was for courtiers and for rising citizens of London. Bunyan, on the other hand was for the semi-literate dissenter and he made his way very slowly towards a just recognition outside of his own class. He was evidently read by other classes, as were the chap books of the period, which correspond roughly to the pulp fiction of the present day, to which in many respects they are greatly superior. Naturally, different classes, whether the distinction was based on social position, religious bias or on a town or



country background had different tastes and inclinations. But we should not assume rigid demarcations in taste, because the population was shifting from class to class, as the career of Pepys, the diarist, amply shows. Wise Quakers and dissenters were acquiring fortunes in trade and business and were forming a new aristocracy, for which the Civil Wars and other important causes had made ample room. New monarchs had new favourites and rewarded them; and thus the nobility itself was being re-constituted at the end of the seventeenth century.

**XI. Stately Homes and Buildings :** New dignities, whether of title or wealth, encourage new ways of life and renewed respect for Augustan decorum. Like the newly created duke, the Wealthy Citizen or the Country squire developed an interest in the beauty of his house, his physical refuge from the turmoil of the day. Lord Macaulay has pointed out the gentry and nobility of the town were proud of their Country seats and spent large sums on remodelling old Gothic mansions into classical houses. Magnificent places were being built and the French-Italian axial garden was already becoming a frequent pattern in landscaping before the end of the century. In the seventeenth century the best architectural tradition was the Palladian style.

**XII. Painting and Music :** Painting in the Restoration period was inferior. Music was practised with the most distinction. Music was the Londoner's chief diversion at home as well as his delight in the theatre. Out of every three houses, one had some sort of Musical instrument at home. Mathew, Locke and Henry Purcell were great musicians of the time. Pepys has remarked that Restoration lovers of music were far from emotionally callous. The introduction of the Italian opera rapidly undermined the English musical tradition, and early in the eighteenth century and thereafter London was largely an Eldorado for the best Continental artists, most of whom could be heard there.

These are the main intellectual and artistic interests of England, during the Restoration period.

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## **Literary Tendencies of the Restoration Age**

The Restoration Age is probably one of the most interesting and important, if not one of the richest, periods in the history of English literature. Though not marked by an exuberant growth of drama as the Elizabethan Age, of poetry as the Romantic Age, or of Criticism as the modern Age, the Restoration Age remains a very important and interesting period for the student of literature because it gave rise to neo-classical tendencies, perfected in the eighteenth century poetry, because it gave birth to modern English prose and because it marks the birth of modern English criticism formulated on the classical dogma of the ancients. It is important because it witnessed the birth and growth of many important literary movements, of many new species of literature in the field of poetry and drama, because it innovated and perfected many forms of literary expression.

If we make a careful perusal of the history of English literature and of the social and political trends we come to know that a change began to come over the spirit of English literature about the middle of the seventeenth century which was not due to any fluctuations in literary fashion but was deep rooted in the life of the time. The Age of Renaissance was an age of expansion—spiritual and material. For the first time Englishmen realised their national solidarity. Emancipated from continental struggles, from the dread of Spanish supremacy, they found an outlet for their excited emotion in drama and song. Their loyalty to the queen, their pride in the country and their delight in country's past are reflected in the "Faerie Queene" and historical dramas of Marlowe and Shakespeare. But the emotional excitement and zeal could not be sustained for long and its splendid exuberance had degenerated into extravagance and violence in the early years of the seventeenth century. The change is a little perceptible in the later writings of Bacon and Milton, whose full significance is realised only in the Restoration Age. The change—

an interest of writers in the political problems of the time—is first met in the poems of Abraham Cowley, Edmund Waller and Sir John Denham: and “it frankly and unmistakably proclaims itself a new note in our literature with the coming of Dryden”.

Compton Rickett has made a penetrative analysis of this change in his “History of English Literature”. “Increasingly during the seventeenth century were men’s thoughts directed to problems of civic and national life. The wild speculative interests and imaginative fervour of the Renaissance, gave place to a practical application of these ideals to actual existence; and naturally enough literature itself became involved with the problems of practical politics, no less than England shared in this re-action from Romanticism, this enthusiasm for affairs rather than ideas, and at this juncture political conditions connected with the Restoration brought the influence of France into special contact with English life and letters”.

There are three important aspects of change in the literature of the Restoration Age : academic, political and psychological. In the Restoration Age the romanticism was replaced by classicism and its ideals. There had been an overwhelming influence of France particularly through the medium of King and his Court. There was a general change in the attitude of the people. Let us discuss these one by one.

### **I. Substitution of Classicism for Romanticism:**

The Age of Dryden sometimes styled itself as the Augustan Age of English poetry. The triumph of the classical ideal was a natural consequence of the Renaissance: The poets of the Renaissance were inspired by the substance and ideas of the Greek and Roman classics, *whereas* the poets and writers of the Restoration Age were attracted by the *methods* of the ancient classical authors. The weaknesses of the Romantic age—its lack of form, its variability, its proneness to extravagance and turgidity that appeared on account of the emotional zeal of the writers—were pruned off by the Restoration poets. Political needs of the time also fostered and encouraged the growth of classical ideals and spirit. Charles

the second during his exile had come across the brilliant set of writers who, actuated by classical methods, had exercised a profound influence all over Europe. When he was restored to the throne, he tried his best to enforce those classical ideals in actuating English Literature. It is under these influences and these circumstances that the new spirit emerged and involved the substitution of the critical for the imaginative, of the classical for the Romantic. "The new spirit, however, is above all critical and analytic, not creative and sympathetic; it brings the intellect rather than the poetic imagination into play. And the merits of the new school are to be found in its intellectual force and actuality, just as its demerits lie in its lack of deep imagination and tendency to deal with manners and superficialities, rather than with elemental things and the larger issues of life."

This sort of change in the attitude and environs encouraged the type of literature that aimed at clarity, conscientiousness and concentrated force. Consequently the finer and valuable aspect of this ideal is reflected in prose, whileas the less attractive aspect, in the poetry, of this period. The leading writers of the age aimed at avoiding extravagance and emotionalism, which has been so successfully done by them that the emotional and basic qualities of poetry are altogether suppressed though their method, imitated from the ancients, has found congenial expression in the satire. Poetry, bereft of all emotional Warmth, had to fall back in epigram. Though the classical ideal proved to be an obstruction in the growth of poetry, yet it encouraged the growth of prose, because the supreme object of prose writers was to be simple in style and natural in manner. The Royal Society, which has a formative influence on the cultivation of English prose style aimed at "a close, marked, natural way of speaking; positive expression, clear sense, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the long age of artisans, countymen, and merchants, before that of wits and scholars."

Actuated by these ideals, the writers of this age aimed at simplicity of style and a normal standard of writing. They were intolerant of individual whims and eccentricities. They

tried to infuse into English letters something of the academic spirit after the fashion of the contemporary French authors. clarity, plainness, conversational ease and directness became the common objectives of all the writers.

**II. The French Influence:** The influence of France on the life and literature of England during the Restoration period and after should not be regarded merely as a cultural or literary accident. There is a deep rooted and vital back ground of this Anglo—French cultural and literary intercourse. The strong affinities between two countries were established in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century. Charles the second chose France during his exile, not on account of some convenience or physical proximity, but on account of cultural affinity and common respect for monarchical culture. After restoration Charles the second and his courtiers brought with them the spirit of French manners and literature because “they felt the attraction of a great reign that had already begun, of a national flowering that was already in full bloom.” One can enumerate various forms of this influence. “It spread from the Court and the fashionable circles of the capital to the most cultivated class in the provinces; it left its strong mark upon fashions and manners, the superficial sides of life; it even penetrated to modes of feeling and thinking, and through the language, as well as through authority of precepts and aesthetic examples, it fashioned or rather taught and encouraged certain habits and preferences of taste.\* A perusal of the literature of this period would reveal that there is abundant number of imitations, borrowings and reminiscences of French literature and that the study of many a writer would be incomplete if this influence were left out of account. The French life and literature had a subtle and real influence upon English life and literature through their diffused effect and through the creation of an atmosphere. Though other countries of the continent had cast their influence on England, yet it is France's that is most predominant. Spanish theatre, for example, had some influence on the British theatre, but the influence of the French theatre was distinct and superior enough to impregnate the very

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\* *A History of English Literature*—Legouis and Cazamian.

quantity of harmony. In the same way, English poetry of the Restoration period was tremendously influenced by the French pattern and style. "The character and rhythm of the English classical line are fixed .....by the authority of an inner choice, which in its turn is prompted, accentuated and even controlled by the cadence of French verse."

By this time Italy had ceased to play a dominant role in the cultural and social life of the continent and France had assumed an acknowledged supremacy in life and letters. It had also become the world's great arbiter in *tas e*. But it was chiefly due to political relations between England and France that everything French, including literary taste and ideas of art came into vogue and became popular in England. Contemporary French literature attached great importance to form and such qualities as lucidity, viracity, correctness, elegance and finish. "It was essentially a literature of polite society, and had all the merits and all the limitations of such a literature. It was moreover a literature in which intellect was in the ascendant and the critical faculty always in control. It was to this congenial literature that English writers now learned to look for guidance, and thus a great impulse was given to the development alike in our prose and in our verse of the principles of regularity and order and the spirit of good sense. As in verse pre-eminently these were now cultivated at the expense of feeling and spontaneity the growth of an artificial type of poetry was the inevitable result."\*

Charles the Second and his ministers had brought back from their continental exile a love of French literature, with all its wit, gallantry, elegance and artistic deftness. Though Virgil, Horace, Cicero, David, Juvenal and other classical authors had a deep influence on English literature, yet the influence of contemporary French writers as Descartes, Molières, Corneille and Boileau was in the ascendant in this period.

**III. Writers and the Social Surroundings :** A study of the background and the atmosphere in which the Restoration literature grew and developed cannot be complete without a proper appraisal of the social conditions of the writer. In the Elizabethan Age there were the privileged few,

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\* W. H. Hudson.

with a few exceptions, who got all sorts of facilities and encouragement, in the form of patronage, from the court and noble lords. In the Restoration age the same conditions continued. In this age there were certain categories of writers who enjoyed abnormally superior facilities. The noble men of old or recent family standing make it a point of pride to write, and everything tends to encourage them." Consequently, men belonging to the upper class, or men of birth or wealth, thought themselves as privileged to write. Never has a man's birth appeared so much to imply a gift for writing, as in this age. Yet there are writers who belonged to the middle or the lower class, because culture had begun to spread among the masses. But such writers, without a social standing, could not flourish, because printing, publishing and selling of books were not controlled or protected by commercial customs or laws and because the reading public had not yet been formed. Every writer had to choose a patron, either permanent or temporary. he had to father him dedicate his works to him, celebrate the events of his personal and family life, and in return he got some gifts and alms from his patron. It is on account of the prevalence of this cruel tradition, that many a writer, not only of mediocre but of the best talent, became victim and could not flourish in his career.

**IV. Themes of the New Literature :—**It was under these diverse influences of moral and social surroundings that literature of the Restoration period grew and developed. As with other Ages, the literature of the Restoration is linked with that of the preceding age. There is no absolute break or clearage between Renaissance and the Restoration, despite unprecedented and radical changes in the political and social conditions of the time. "We have the same men writing before and after 1660; those who have waited for the return of the king in order to write, have breathed the air of the Republic; those who preferred exile not only have been influenced by foreign modes of living, but in the coteries of the emigration have felt the radiation of an ideal elegance and spiritual precocity, in which survived the very soul of the Renaissance in its declining phase. Despite the gap represented by the Republic, it is not only in an official and fictitious sense

that Charles II succeeds Charles I. In a deeper plane, the initial stages of a literary evolution had already unfolded themselves, announcing and preparing for the new age; themes had been sketched out, innovations attempted inform; so that neither in their inspiration nor in their art or language do writers after 1660 differ radically from their predecessors. Overlapping this date on either side certain schools develop, just as others die out. Lastly, the apparent break with the moral past conceals the working of a need for psychological renovation which, through the permanent action of one and the same motive power, constitutes the solidarity of the periods, just as it produces their diversity." \*

Despite the absence of an absolute cleavage or break from the preceding age, the literature of the Restoration found itself in open reaction against the general spirit of the Renaissance, or the Elizabethan age. First, the Restoration writers do not directly seek their inspiration from the writers of the preceding age; they look for their models in the ancient classics of Italy and in the contemporary French writers. Though Beaumont and Fletcher are adored, Ben Jonson is venerated and Shakespeare is admired, yet the Restoration writers feel that the Elizabethan age had not been able to evolve the maturity of form. They thank themselves to be the august herald of it.

So far as poetry is concerned, the prevalent style at the advent of Dryden was "the peculiar style unfortunately baptised as 'metaphysical'" the more Catholic criticism of the last 100 years has disemberassed this poetry of much of the odium which once hung round it, without, however, doing full justice to its merits. In Donne, especially, the King of the School, the conceits and laboured fancies which distinguish it frequently reach a hardly surpassed height of poetical beauty. When Donne speculates as to the finding on the body of his dead lover.

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone when he tells us how :

*I long to talk with some old lover's ghost  
who died before the god of love was born;*



the effect is that of summer lightning on a dark night suddenly exposing unsuspected realms of fantastic and poetical suggestion. But at its worst the school was certainly had enough, and its badness had already been exhibited by Dryden with considerable felicity in his poem on Lord Hastings and the small pox. I really do not know that in all Johnson's carefully picked specimens in his *Life of Cowley*, a happier absurdity is to be found than

Each little pimple had a tear in it,  
To wail the fault its rising did commit:

of such a school as this though it lent itself more directly than is generally thought to the unequalled oddities of Butler, little good in any way of serious poetry could come."\* Thus on the one hand the so-called metaphysical poetry was incapable of producing anything serious and on the other hand, the great romantic school was practically over. Milton, the last survivor of the Renaissance, was it a state of poetical eclipse. There was therefore going up a kind of school of good sense Cowley and Davenant were the chiefs. The reputation of Waller rests on his lyrics though inferior to those of Harrick and Carew. Cowley was a metaphysician and Denham had devoted himself chiefly to doggerel. Devenant had a more living influence on the coming generation. Apart from their literary output, the real importance of these four wilters was the help they gave to the evolution of the heroic couplet, which was destined to be the common form of poetry for about one and a half centuries. The Heroic couplet was not a new thing in English but so far it had been either patronised for long narrative poems or adapted for general use. The whole structure of the decasyllabic line before 1660 was ill calculated for the perfecting of the couplet. The writers had got into the habit of communicating to their verse a slow and languid movement because they were accustomed either to the stately plainness of the blank verse or to the elaborate intricacies of the stanza. Even in satiric poems the heroic Couplet was roughly used. It had two Principal drawbacks : " Either it was turned by means of *enjambment* into something

\*George Sainsbury " *Dryden* "

very like rhythmic prose with rhymes straying about at apparently indefinite intervals, or it was broken up into a *staccato* motion by the neglect to support and carry on the rhythm at the termination of the distichs." These four poets—Waller, Denham, Cowley and Denham—did a great deal to fit the couplet for miscellaneous work. All these four authors did not do as much as was done by John Dryden who waiting for opportunity and impulse to help him to make his way.

The drama was in a more critical state than poetry. Restoration drama has been regarded as both the glory and the shame of the period. The comedies handle wit, satire and neat situation in a manner hardly surpassed elsewhere in English drama, but they are not orieusly defident in moral decency, though very sensitive to a superficial norm in manners. In the more serious plays produced shortly after the Restoration there is an artificial declamatory elevation which, joined with bustling action and elaborate spectacle, dazzled the audience. Later this 'heroic' type of play yielded to dramas of pathos and domestic sentimentality.

There were great masters of English prose living when Dryden joined the literary world of London. But there was no accepted prose style of literature. One can imagine the dangers difficulties of the contemporary prose style by going through the elaborate symphonies of Milton and Taylor and the intricate structure of sentences used by Clarendon and Cromwell. The writers were fond of using quotations and they introduced them with merciless frequency. Besides, there were several drawbacks in the prose style of the day. It had no notion of a unit of style in the sentence. It indulged in every detour and involution second thoughts and by the way qualifications. The model of style were taken from the inflected languages of Greece and Rome, where the structural alterations of the words accordings to their grammatical connection are sufficient to make the meaning clear. A clear straight forward English prose had not yet evolved. The common people could speak and write as on clear from the novels of Jhon Bunyan. But the scholars were not satisfied with it. It may be said than prose was worse than poetry. In poetry, an excellent style had been developed,

though it did not perfectly suit for all ends and had even degenerated. But in a prose, nothing like a general prose style had ever yet been elaborated. Though Cowley wrote well and elegantly yet his prose work was small in extent and little read in comparison to his poems. Tillotson was Dryden's contemporary, and could not do anything to reform English prose style.

**V. The influence of court and its manners :** It is very difficult to appraise and appreciate the Restoration literature without giving due consideration to the influence of court and its manners, with the Restoration on of Charles the second a fundamental change occurred in social life of London. The king was very lazy and leachours and could not give any reliable and systematic strength to his government. He is surrounded by men of aristocratic birth who organize a court. The king distributed preferments and positions according to his sweet will, almost arbitrarily people had become disgusted of democracy based on equality and welcomed the monarchy in the hope of having a stable order of things. White hall becomes the centre of officialdom and elegant life, and Westminster and parliament are cast into shade. London prides itself upon the near presence of the monarch and acquires courtier tone. Provincial England away from London, does not participate in this brilliant life. The atmosphere is favourable for the growth of aristocratic literature.

**VI. Imitation of the ancients :** The age of Dryden is generally called the neo-classical age because the writers of this period imitated the ancient classical authors and tried to achieve the same objectives of form and style as were achieved by Virgil, Ovid and Horace. Prof. Albert has commented in his short history of English literature. Lacking the genius of the Elizabethans, the authors of the time turned to the great classical authors, in particular to the Latin writers, for guidance and inspiration. This habit quite noticeable during the succeeding era of Pope so much so that the letter laid down as a final test of excellence.

*"Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem'  
To copy Nature is to copy them.*

The influence of the Latin and Greek writers and of the ancient classical literature on the Restoration writers and literature can easily be exaggerated on account of the change in the social and political conditions and in the general outlook and attitude of life, the ancient writers of Greek and Latin literature naturally became the masters. To resemble them was not only desirable but also inevitable, because it were the ancients who had forcefully expressed the civilised mind of the ancients and its drawbacks. Cowley has pointed out in the **Preface** to his poems that some kinds of Restoration writings could be "**cold-meat of the ancients, new-heated**", and that the charge of plagiarism could easily be levied against any writer, however great and original. Pope faced this situation in the twelfth issue of the **Guardian** and in the **Preface** to his poems of 1717. He said that voluntary borrowing is inevitable, but the classical reader's enjoyment will be increased rather than diminished by his remembrance of the original. "those who say our thoughts are not our own because they resemble the ancients may as well say our Faces are not our own because they are like our Fathers' this is why he did not claim for any originality of ideas; he prided only on the newness and correctness of expression. "What oft was thought but never so well expressed" was the literary motto of Pope. Devotion to and imitation of the ancients posterred some faults:- external conception of literary graces, loss of linguistic subtlety, obtrusion of unassimilated Latin diction heavy and artfully deliberate composition. It had many advantages as well. It encouraged a vigorous grasp of social themes, a concern for discipline and verbal skill. It also encouraged the growth of many forms of literary expression: epic, ode-pindaric and Horatian-epistle, epigram etc.

The Restoration writers were not ashamed of imitating the ancients, instead, they felt pride and creation in so doing. They had a high regard for them for their works and style. Dryden, defending the Restoration writers against the charge of plagiarism and lack of originality, has quoted Longinus in the *Preface to Troilus and Cressida* that these great men "whom

we propose to ourselves as patterns of our imitation, were to us as a torch which is lighted up before us, to enlighten our passage and offer to elevate our thoughts as high as the conception we have of our authors's genius"

Mr. A. R. Humphreys has also spoken highly of the Restoration writers' imitating the ancients. 'It is easy to overstress the Augustans' debt to the past. They lived their own lives, thought their own thoughts, and developed their own styles, yet a respect for the way things had been done before, by those who had done them well, was a part of their sense of responsibility, no more to be deplored than their addiction to classical architecture. They felt themselves part of a majestic ideal of humanity, emulating and striving to surpass but not rejecting the masters'

During the age of Dryden, it was tacitly assumed, even openly asserted by some writers and critics, that kinds, modes of treatment and all other minor details of literature had been settled, once for all, by the ancient classical authors. Referring to this characteristics Age, Mair has observed in his book *Modern English Literature*: "the period of Dryden some times styled itself the Augustan Age of English poetry. It grounded its claim to classicism on a fancied resemblance to be Roman poets of Latin poets of the golden age of Latin poetry, the reign of the Emperor Augustus. Its authors saw themselves each as a second Virgil, a second Ovid, most of all a second Horace, and they believed that their relation to the big world, their assured position in society, heightened the resemblances. they endeavoured to form their poetry on the lines laid down in the critical writings of the original Augustan Age as elaborated and interpreted in Renaissance criticism." The writers of the Restoration age thought that all rules of literature all kinds, modes of treatment, and even minor details of literature were, once for all, settled by the ancients. For example, there were laid down for the tragedy certain proper parts and a fixed order of treatment. In the same way a heroic poem should have a story or a 'fable' and should be treated in a certain fixed manner, particularly after the manner of the ancients. The Restoration writers called them selves as belonging to the

Augustan Age or to the neo—classical school because they observed these rules. Besides, they thought that they had the temper of the Augustan time—the temper displayed particularly in the works of Horace—its urbanity, its love of good sense and moderation, its instinctive distrust of emotion and its invincible good breeding. The chief purpose of literature, according to these writers, was to follow nature and nature to them meant all that is opposite of art and the negation of what was fantastic, tortured, or far-sought in thinking or writing. To be more precise, they aimed at simplicity of style and a normal standard of writing and avoided all sorts of individual eccentricities.

**VII. The Correct school:** As has been stated, the Restoration writers followed and imitated the ancient classical authors of Greece and Rome. Even the writers of the Elizabethan age were inspired by ancient classics. The Elizabethans were inspired by the ideas of the classics while as the restoration writers were attracted by the form and style of the ancient classics, begun by the Greeks and settled in its completed form by the authors and critics of the reign of Augustus Caesar. They assumed that all rules of literature, all kinds and modes of treatment, all details such as figures of Speech, use of epithets and the rest—of literature were once for all laid down by the ancients. Elizabethans had imitated the ancients, but they used their gains freely and joyously. They used the classical material according to their own will. But the imitative work of the Restoration writers is of a frigid and limited quality. Dryden and his followers loathed to introduce any alteration and Pope did not give any freedom to writers. He wrote—

*Those rules of old discovered, not devised,  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodised.*

So they thought that there cannot be better doing than the ancients. They evolved a number of rules which were to be observed by every writer. All these rules can be summarised in one injunction "Be correct". "Correctness" means avoidance of enthusiasm, moderate opinions, moderately expressed, strict care and accuracy in poetical technique, and humble imitation of the Latin classics". Dryden in his early verse, which was more fashioned according to the ideals of the preceding age,

could not achieve these classical ideals of style and treatment in entirety. Consequently he was branded as 'copious' by Pope and his immediate successors, because his early works exhibited some lack of care and unrestrained vigour, which were the characteristics of the Renaissance literature yet he is as much influenced by these classical ideals and has as much fostered and encouraged them in English literature as any of his contemporaries or eighteenth century successors. It was Dr. Johnson who first applied the epithet 'Augustan' to him because he did to English literature what Emperor Augustus had done to Rome which he 'found of brick and left of marble'. Dryden was the first great exponent of the neo-classical ideals that were to dominate English literature for one and a half centuries.

This stress on the formal aspects of literature had its merits as well as demerits. The spirit of the Restoration literature was critical and formalistic which resulted in the loss of poetic sensibilities and creative imagination. A. C. Rickett has remarked : "The new spirit, however, is above all critical and analytic, not creative and sympathetic; it brings the intellect rather than the poetic imagination into play. The merits of the new school are to be found in its intellectual force and actuality, just as its demerits lie in its lack of deep imagination and tendency to deal with manners and superficialities, rather than with elemental things and the larger issues of life.

"Obviously, then, this change was better adapted for a kind of literature which aimed especially at clearness, conscientiousness and concentrated force. The less attractive aspect of this ideal is seen in the verse of the day; the finer and more valuable aspects in its prose."

The leading writers of the age aimed at avoiding extravagance and emotionalism. It has been so successfully done by them that emotional and basic qualities of poetry are altogether suppressed, though their method has found a congenial expression in the satire. Poetry became epigrammatic because it was bereft of emotional sustenance. If the 'good sense' ideal checked the growth of great and serious poetry, it proved an admirable ideal for the growth of prose that had suffered from romantic extravagances in the Elizabethan age.

The--neo classical ideals purged the prose of all those oddities and eccentricities. In this age the aim of every writer is to be simple in style and natural in manner. The foundation of the English prose of the Restoration and the eighteenth century was actually laid at this time when the Restoration writers deliberately adopted and observed the neo--classical rules of writing.

This new spirit, mainly critical and analytical, chilled the poetic sensibility. But it went a long way to foster a more clear and a more lucid prose style. This also gave rise to the satirical verse which is the best known literary form of the Restoration age. The poetic sensibility became chilled because lyric became the weakest form in the Restoration age, so much so that it cannot stand any comparison with the lyric either of the Elizabethan or of the Romantic age. The significance of the restoration literature lies in the sphere of prose. It is in this age that a deliberate attempt is made to develop and cultivate a clear and simple prose style. The writers invoked the qualities of smoothness and lucidity. "In the place of the logical subtleties which Donne and his school had sought in the scholastic writers of the middle Ages, they brought back the typically Renaissance study of rhetoric; the characteristic of all the poetry of the period is that it has a rhetorical quality. It is never intimate and never profound, but it has point and wit, and it appeals with confidence to the balanced judgment which men, who distrust emotion and have no patience with subtleties, emotional, or merely verbal--have in common. Alongside this lucidity, this air of complete statement' in substance, they strove for and achieved smoothness in form.

It is on account of the adoption of classical ideal and the imitation of the ancients, as well as, on account of a change in the socio-political conditions of the time, that many a change occurred in the Restoration era. The change is more psychological than physical, and brought about many changes in the form and expression of literature. The Restoration age is significant in the growth of critical and analytical spirit, popularity of verse satire, the birth and growth of a smooth and lucid prose style. It is also remarkable for the general loss of great and serious poetry on account of the drying up of the creative faculty and poetic sensibilities.



**VIII. Realism :** Hobbes and Locke, directly as well as indirectly, fostered a realistic attitude towards life and society. When the creative faculty is cast into shade and the critical and analytical one becomes ascendant, the outlook becomes realistic. It is on account of intellectuality and critical outlook that Restoration literature is devoid of all the Elizabethan idealism and becomes realistic in tone and temper. The Royal society which laid emphasis on a close and natural way of speaking as near to mathematical plainness as they could, did a great deal in fostering a taste for the realistic portrayal of life. The Restoration writers have painted realistic pictures of a corrupt society and Court. They have emphasised vices rather than virtues and have not condemned the prevailing ills of the time. The dramas are coarse and low, without any interest or moral significance. W. J. Long has mentioned that "Like Hobbes, they saw only the externals of man, his body and appetites, not his soul and its ideals; and so, like most realists, they resemble a man lost in the woods, who wanders aimlessly around in circles seeing the confusing trees but never the whole forest and who seldom thinks of climbing the nearest high hill to get his bearings. Later, however, this tendency to realism became more wholesome. While it neglected Romantic poetry, in which youth is eternally interested, it led to a keener study of the practical motives which govern human action."

This critical faculty led to the realistic portraiture of society and manners on the one hand and encouraged the tendency towards directness and simplicity of expression, on the other hand. English Literature owes a great deal to this valuable contribution of the Restoration. It is due to the revolt against the extravagance of the Elizabethan age, that English prose in every branch of writing so prolifically developed during the Restoration, eighteenth century and after. The general tendency of the writers, during the Elizabethan and the Republican period, was towards extravagance of thought and language. Sentences were often involved and loaded with Latin quotations. This is amply reflected if one goes through the pages of *Urn Burial* of Browne or *Areopagitica* of Milton. In prose "nothing like a general prose style had ever yet been elaborated at all, what had been done chiefly in the

big-bow-wow manner, as Dryden's editor might have called it. For light miscellaneous work, neither fantastic nor solemn, the demand was only just being created. Cowley indeed wrote well, and, comparatively speaking, elegantly; but his prose work was small in extent and little read in comparison to his verse. Tillotson was Dryden's own contemporary, and hardly preceded him in the task of reform." \* The Restoration writers not only opposed the romantic extravagance vigorously but also introduced some reforms in the English prose style. Instead of aiming at elaborateness, they aimed at conciseness and concentrated force. The king and his courtiers had brought with them from France, "a tendency to regard the established rules of writing, to emphasize close reasoning rather than romantic fancy and to use short, clean-cut sentences without an unnecessary word." The influence is seen in the Royal Society which had for one of its objects the reform of English prose by getting rid of, "all amplifications, digressions and swellings of style." The society bound all its members 'to return back to the primitive purity and shortness and to use "a close, naked natural way of speaking, positive expression, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of Artizans, country men and Merchants before that of wits and scholars"' Dryden accepted this excellent rule for his prose and adopted heroic couplet for the greater part of his poetry. He chose the heroic couplet, though rugged and unpolished, because it appeared to him the fittest medium of discourse.

*And this unpolished rugged verse I choose  
As fittest for discourse, and nearest prose."*

It is largely due to Dryden that writers developed a liking for and adopted formalism in style, precise and mathematical elegance which ruled English literature during the Restoration and the eighteenth century.

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\* George Saintsbury.

## THE RESTORATION VERSE

With the Restoration of Charles the Second there had occurred a change in the temper of the age. The later years of Milton's life were entirely different from his earlier life. The political and social conditions of England had undergone a radical transformation and there had occurred a change in the attitude and outlook towards government, society and religion. The socio-political tensions of the time and the violence through which men had lived had a very hardening effect upon their sensibilities. The puritan rule had become universally unpopular on account of Cromwell's despotism. The Restoration of Charles II was hailed with great relief throughout England, especially at London, the centre of court life and literature. The Restoration verse is shaped under three influences—classical, French and native. The Elizabethans were attracted by the imaginative exuberance, emotional warmth and zeal of the other aspect of the ancient classical literature, by its formal and external aspect of the classics. Prof. Albert comments, "Lacking the genius of the Elizabethans, the authors of the time turned to the great classical writers, for guidance and inspiration. This habit, quite noticeable during the time of Dryden, deepened and hardened during the succeeding era of Pope so that the latter laid down as a final test of excellence.

*Lean hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
To copy Nature is to copy them.*

It is on account of the imitation of the ancients, particularly Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Juvenal, and on account of the observance of rules laid down by the ancients, that the age of Dryden is called the neo-classical age. This neo-classicism implied a veneration for the Roman classics, thought and way of life. The second influence on the Restoration verse was that of France. Charles the second had brought back from his continental exile a love of French wit, gallantry, elegance, and artistic deftness. The influence of Descartes, Moliere,

Corneille and Boileau was as much as, if not more than, that of Virgil; Horace, Ovid and Juvenal. It is very curious to note that Restoration verse equally reflects Roman stateliness and French refinement. The third influence was that of England herself. As hinted before, the new spirit had dawned. It was critical and analytic rather than creative and sympathetic. It brought intellect rather than poetic imagination into play. The chief merit of the Restoration verse lies in intellectual force and actuality and the chief demerit lies in its lack of deep imagination. The literature of the period is concerned with dealing with manners and superficialities rather than with elemental things and larger issues of life. Actuated by critical and analytical faculty the Restoration verse aims at clearness, conscientiousness and concentrated force, when the object of the leading writers of the day is to avoid extravagance and emotionalism, the emotional and other basic qualities of great poetry are bound to be suppressed and decay of time and serious poetry is bound to follow. Of course this method finds congenial expression in the satire. Referring to the change in the temper, James Reeves has observed in his book "*A short History of English poetry.*" A spirit of hard headed and self-seeking rivalry vivified the literary world; the sense of chivalry which had proved so disastrous to the fortunes of the Royalist poets was replaced by an altitude of realism, and even of cynicism. The gentle men poets who thronged the extravagant and pleasure loving Charles II at Whitehall in search of patronage had inherited the smooth, neat, epigrammatic manner of the cavaliers but not their warmth and ardour." Sedley and Sackville wrote a number of light and graceful songs, Rochester, in his lyrical and satirical poems, combined brutal cynicism with wit and good sense. With him as with the other Restoration song writers, love was sex. In the atmosphere of court and sophisticated London, poets had no other alternative than to combine wit with bawdry. The opening stanzas of Rochester's Lampoon on Charles II reveal this characteristic of all the poets of the courtly school.

*Chaste, pious, prudent Charles the Second,  
The miracle of thy Restoration*

*May like to that of quails be reckoned  
 Rained on the Israelitish nation;  
 The wi-hed for blessing from Heaven sent  
 Became their Curse and punishment.*

*The Virtues in thee, Charles, inherent,  
 Although thy countenance be an odd-piece;  
 Proves thee as true God's vice-regent  
 As ever was Harry with the codpiece.  
 For chastity and pious deeds  
 His grandsire Harry, Charles exceeds.*

*Our Romish bondage breaker Harry  
 Espoused half a dozen wives;  
 Charles only one resolved to marry.  
 And other men's he never strives.  
 Yet hath he sons and daughters more  
 Than ever had Harry by three score.*

The distinguishing marks of the literature of this period were wit and good sense, and they all but killed poetry. The age was opposed to idealism, enthusiasm, extravagance, the inspired frenzy which had once been taken for granted as of the essence of poetry, yet some of the poets of the time, notably Dryden, desired consciously to preserve the heroic strain in English poetry. How were they to do this when the heroic temper, except in the mind of Milton, had perished in the Civil War and the Protectorate? How was the old Spenserian magnanimity to be regarded by a generation which derived its philosophy from the self-regarding materialism of Hobbes? Dryden's response to this problem was the epic satire; Pope's was the mock heroic. Since heroic love was no longer possible, heroic hate might replace it. The emotional element in poetry took the form of a hatred which, with Dryden, had about it something noble, and with Pope deteriorated into a sick man's malice. There was about the satirical spirit of the age, something purely negative and destructive; its positive effect indirect though it was, lay in helping towards the establishment of that attitude of tolerant good sense and humane materialism which characterised British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

**Lyrical Poetry:-** The Restoration age is deficient in lyrical poetry and far much inferior to the ages preceding and succeeding it. There is nothing to the Elizabethan age and the Romantic age. No poet of the Restoration age can stand in comparison with the Elizabethan sonneteers and lyricists or with the poets of the Romantic age. The poverty of the Restoration age in lyrical output has been pointed out by Humphreys: "The Augustan stock is now lowest" perhaps in lyrics, the standards of comparison are the supreme ones of the flanking pre-Restoration and the Romantic periods. The delicacy, the freshness, the fervour and even art of the Elizabethan and the Romantic lyrics seems to have completely disappeared.

The object of the Restoration poets was to write good verse not good lyrical poems. It is clarity of expression and smoothness of style and rhythm that count in a verse while as emotional outburst and poignancy of feeling are the main ingredients of a lyric, as was written in the Elizabethan or the Romantic age. The domination of the classical influence, coupled with the French refinement and elegance led to the development of verse rather than lyric. The motto of the Restoration poets can be aptly described by quoting the following lines of Robert Herrick.

*Trust to good verses then  
They only will aspire  
When pyramids as men  
Are lost i' the funeral fire*

"Their poems, which nearly all deal with the love theme in artificial manner, have a decided charm and skill, being modelled on the Caroline poems that were the mode before the civil war. of real originality there is hardly a trace," (Albert). There is lack of originality, of personal passion, emotional outburst, some poignancy of feeling which is the breath of a true lyric. Mostly the lyric poets of the Restoration are song writers. With them love is sex. The conventions of *amour courtois* are turned inside out, and the mistress is not so much a goddess as an animal.

There is the lack of Romantic suggestiveness in the lyrics of the Restoration age. The chief characteristics of the Resto-

ration lyrics have been summed by Mair, "Classical poetry is, so to speak, all there. Its meaning is all of it on the surface it conveys nothing but what it says, and what it says it says completely. It is always vigorous and direct, often pointed and aphoristic, never merely suggestive, never given to half statement, and never obscene. You feel that as an instrument of expression it is sharp and polished and shining; it is always bright and defined in detail." The lyrics of the Romantic poets are different from those of the Restoration ones. Their poetry is suggestive. Their poetry is a thing of half light and half spoken suggestions, of imaginative hints, of words that enrich the meaning by sound effect, a thing that stirs the vague and implacable restlessness of memory or terror desire that lies down beneath the minds of men. It rouses the transcendental feeling in the reader and makes him feel the immediate presence of the eternal.

The Restoration poets laid much emphasis on the formal aspect of literature, on external ornamentation and artistic qualities. Their chief aim was to combine the natural and the correct, which is expressed in the following verse:

*The Expression easy, and the fancy high,  
Yet that not seem to creep nor this to fly;  
No words transposed, but in such cadence,  
As, though hard wroughtt may seem the effect of chance."*

Yet we should have some esteem for the Restoration lyrics. The Restoration poetry is condemned or neglected because our taste in poetry has changed extremely in the last hundred and fifty years that for many persons Dryden and his school are practically unreadable. But this is not true. Dryden is one of the most significant poets in the history of English poetry, because he formulated a method for poetry that has appealed to disciples as different as Pope, Gray, Churchill, Byron, Keats and T. S. Eliot. His method dominated English verse for two generations after his death. Dryden's way was not that of a sensuous romantic, "tremblingly alive all over, unlocking his heart of hearts for the public to see." His lyrics are impersonal, almost editorial, criticism of life. They hardly seem to be the language of the emotions or of the senses.

It is a method that conceives of poetry as intellectual utterance emotionally or imaginatively suffused so as to persuade a public audience. It is in short the poetry of eloquence. His poetry is 'occasional' and the occasion which it celebrates are public and important. As time passes, the importance of occasion also fades. Hence a little unpopularity of his lyrics.

Basically, Dryden's school is devoted to a *belief* in control as essential to art, to a disbelief in unpremeditated art. This love of control also operated in the field of metrics and the closed heroic couplet became the favourite metre for Dryden, and his followers. Dryden excelled all other English poets in the Cowleyan Pindaric. The stanza forms used for songs in his plays are neat and varied, But the bulk of his poetic work is written in the heroic couplet. Though he did not invent it, he surely perfected it.

The lyric is at its lowest ebb during the Restoration. But it is remarkable for its poised movement, its *personal* content communicated in *public* expression as though the *personal* thought was being adduced for the pleasure of a lively and sophisticated society. "The mode derives ultimately, though with decreasing power, from Johnson and his cavalier followers like Carew and Lovelace and predominantly from verse like that of Waller. His "*Go, lovely Rose*," is in a straight syntax carrying straight plea' with a beautifully hanging rhyme which gratifies the ear and distracts attention from some banality of phrase. The sway of movement comes through sensitive alternation of longer and shorter lines, and the same qualities of trim form and movement characterise his lines "*On a Girdle*". Restoration world is completely reflected in Dorset's "To All you Ladies now at land;" the tone is gay; the language is that of badinage, syntax is neat. The social mode is reflected in the poem. There is little artistic seriousness and so far as the Elizabethan feeling and imagination are concerned, there is the complete loss of them.

Dryden is the chief lyric poet of the Restoration age. His lyrical output is scattered in some fine lyrics in his plays, in his elegiac odes and ode on St. Cecilia Allardyce Nicoll has made the following comment on the lyrics of Dryden.



In treating Dryden's lyrics we must bear in mind two things. The first is that the age in which he lived had not lost that love of music which is so apparent in the time of Shakespeare. Pepys adored music, and Pepys was but one of many. One of the chief innovations in the Restoration theatre is concerned with the development of the orchestra. The native English musical strain which gave to us the pleasant mardigals and diffies of earlier days, which produced as a final culmination the genius of Purcell, was not to be killed until the appearance of Italian opera in the eighteenth century. It was being affected in the late seventeenth century by the continental taste of Charles, but it was still a dominating and vigorous thing. This love of music combined with the desire for novelty theatre led toward the introduction of numerous lyrics in the tragedies and in the comedies of the time. As the years advanced, these musical interludes increased until, toward the end of the century, there was no appreciable difference between a play and an opera. As Dryden's songs are mainly dramatic, they must be considered in close relation to be development. The second point to be observed is the decay of lyric spirit in this period with the rise of heroic couplet and the domination of reason in poetic realms, the lyric tended to take a lower place among the composition of the poets. The Romantic revival of the mid-eighteenth century apparent first as rival of lyric measures. The lyric that endured over the intervening period had a strictly limited existence. In metre, the Restoration song is usually regular, of few lines to the stanza or it is frankly irregular in a mistaken effort to capture that classic 'Pindric' rhythm foisted on the world by Abraham Cowley. On the other hand, the lyric retained more freedom than the couplet, permitting the introduction of feet other than the plain ambus preserving everywhere a title of Elizabethan grace and liberty. In subject matter however, it suffered a sad restruction instead of treating all themes, the Restoration song became with the exception of the 'Pindaric' odes, almost exclusively a love ditty, cavalier in sentiment and lacking emotional sincerity.

That Dryden wrote lyrics, therefore, is but another sign of his relation to his age, but that he succeeded so signally marks him out as being in some ways above his age. Dryden, we must remember, had many ties of kinship with the poets

who had gone before him, and it is the presence of him of the Elizabethan characteristics which makes him stand higher than his contemporaries. In the measure of his couplets he has not forgotten the delicate rhythms of previous singers, so that his lyrics and his odes have melodies in rhythm which for the most part are lacking in the similar productions of the contemporaries. His pure lyrics, his songs, may be mostly love poems, but they have a note that appears to be a combination of Elizabethan and of Restoration feelings.

The other lyric poets of the Restoration age are Rochester, Charles Sedley, Earl of Dorset, and Charles Cotton. The lyric songs of Rochester are chiefly amorous. There is no parallel poetic or sexual fury behind the phrases. He gives us graceful and effective approximations of passion. He has presented his frank philosophy of love in Strephon and Daphne.

*Love, like other little boys  
Cries for hearts, as they for toys.  
Which, when gained, in childish play,  
Wantonly are thrown away."*

In his brief songs such as "*My Dear Mistress has a heart*" and in "*Love and Life*" he shows beautifully firm finish that is not found in the contemporary lyricists.

*"All my past life is mine no more  
The flying Hours are gone :  
Like transitory dreams given over,  
Whose Images are kept in store  
By Memory alone."*

The lyrics of Charles Sedley are of two types. First is pleading, ingratiating, and yet witty, solicitation, seem charmingly in the love-song beginning.

*Not, Celia, that I juster am,  
Or better than the rest,  
For I would change each hour like them,  
Were not my heart at rest—*

and seen at its best in the rich Elizabethan melody, delicacy and fancy of

*Love still has something of the sea,  
From whence his mother rose;  
No time his slaves from doubt cau free  
Nor give their thoughts repose.*

the second type of the love lyric is the playful song. There is also a note a satire in some songs, as in "*To a Devout young Gentle woman.*"

*"Who overacts her piety and is told  
'Tis early to begin to fear  
The devil at fifteen."*

It is on account of such lyrics and love longs that Sedley is known to be one of the best lyric poets of his country.

The lyrics of Sackville and Cotton are of minor importance. Sackville was more caustic and satirical in spirit. But those of Cotton are natural, genuine love poems. His lyrics are influenced by the French lyricists of the century. He produces very charming effects in these imitations.

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## THE NATURE OF SATIRE

Satire has never received serious attention on from English criticism. Though certain signs of an increased interest in satirical writings have cropped up in recent years, yet a good deal of the old Romantic prejudice against satire still persists. The apparent reason for this is that the satirist is destructive; he destroys but he does not create. Satirist, is not supposed to be a creative branch of literature. Satirist, as was remarked by Kenneth Tynan about Shaw, is a demolition expert. The feeling that satire is somehow negative uncreative and irresponsible still persists. The other reason is that satire, even when an object of literary criticism, is not treated as a separate literary form, because the satirical works vary widely in structure, tone and intentions. "*Hudibras*," *The Rape of the Lock*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Vicar of Bray*, *The Dunciad*, *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift*, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, *The Vision of Judgement*, are all satirical poems and have nothing in common except that they are all critical of actual people, of an existing state and of some affairs. Then it is very difficult to make a clear cut demarcation between the satirical and the unsatirical, because the writer shifts very rapidly from one mood to another and because the tone of satire is so rarified that it becomes almost imperceptible.

**The Distinction between the satirical and the Comic :** It is very difficult to distinguish the satirical from the comic because both the writer of a comedy and satires deal with, more or less the same stuff. The writer of a comedy is concerned with follies and imperfections and faults of men and women. He perceives certain rigidities, a certain inelasticity of mind or lack of adaptation in men and women and in his works he exposes them in action. He accepts the natural and acquired follies, extravagance and impudence that is seen in the world and portrays them in his works. But he has no moral issues to push on the persons who are foolish, extravagant and impudent. It is this spirit that Shakespeare

watches Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch, Bottom and Autolycus, and it is because he does not pass his moral judgment that these characters are allowed to grow into perfection of irresponsibility or folly. It does not mean that the writer himself has no standards or norms of moral conduct. He simply does not have any vested interest in pushing moral standards. "His attitude to those who fall short of them appears to vary from an amused tolerance to a cheerful or even delighted acceptance. So far as human nature is concerned, he is much more likely to appear counsel for the Defence than counsel for the Prosecution, but his moral position is among the spectators in the public gallery. Although he judges what he sees and hears, he has no great desire to pass judgement, and still less to strip bare and victimise the intellectual and moral imbeciles he has observed." Thus the intention of the writer of a comedy is simply to present human abnormalities, natural or acquired, and not to pass any moral judgement on them, much less to penalise or victimise them.

The intentions and objectives of a satirist, on the other hand are not only to expose human follies but also to expose and to protest against them confronted with the same human short-comings as the writer of a comedy, he is driven to protest. He does not simply contemplate over those short-comings and faults, he exposes them, makes them an object of derision, and makes them as ugly as he believes them to be.

There are various motives that lead a man to satirical writing. But one motive is constant and universally operative. The satirist is exceptionally sensitive to the gap between what might be and what is. He feels a sort of compulsion to straighten the things, to draw the attention of the people to departures from truth, honesty and justice. His main intention is to restore the balance, to correct the error and correct or punish the wrong doer. The worlds finest satirical writings are decidedly an outcome of the spontaneous overflow of powerful indignation and acts as a catharsis for such emotions. The success of a satirist depends upon the fact that how far he has been able to effect that catharsis, how far he has been able to compel the reader to agree with him,

how far he has been able to make the readers accept his Judgement of good and evil, of right and wrong. In order to effect it, i. e. to make the readers agree with him, the satirist takes the help of the art of persuasion, which is the chief function of rhetoric. The definition of 'rhetoric' as given in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "is the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others." In this respect, satire can be called a department of rhetoric because it persuades others with the help of his art of persuasion. "Where the writer of comedy is content to interest and amuse, and to fashion delightful patterns out of human character and action, the writer of satire is trying to persuade men to admire or despise, to examine their habitual assumptions, to face ugly facts, to look beneath the surface of things, to change sides in politics, of religion, to return to the old and true, to abandon the old and outworn, to do this or to do the exact opposite-in short, to see, to think or believe whatever seems good to the writer of satire. It is, then, the satirist's intention that differentiates him from most other writers; and though individual satirists vary greatly from one-another in temperament, and so may be quite unlike in their method and approach, they have in common the practical intention of working upon the mind of the reader so as to influence his attitudes and beliefs, and ultimately, it may be, his actions."\*

The satirist is unpopular because he makes us face hard and uncomfortable facts of life. The satirist has to be distinguished, besides writer of comedy, from the preachers, from such author as the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, from political journalist etc.

If we assume that the intention of a satirist is to expose, to divide or condemn, then many comedies should properly be called the works of satire. Even the literary critics will prefer to call them satires. Trissino said that, while both tragedy and comedy aimed at teaching, the distinction between the two was that of method. The comedy teaches by 'dividing and censuring things ugly and vile.' The purpose

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\* James Sutherland : *English Satire*.

of comedy, according to Elyot, is to lay bare evil. According to Philip Sidney, a comic poet deals with the common errors of our-life, which he represents in the most ridiculous and scornful sort. Jonson's comedies are more satirical than comic. Jeremy Collier, in his *Short view of the Immoral and profaneness of the English stage*, said that the business of plays is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice. It is to expose the singularities of pride and fancy, to make folly and falsehood contemptible, and to bring everything that is under infamy and neglect." It is on account of the corrective aim of comedy, that tend to be satires.

The main difficulty in distinguishing between comedy and satire when we come to consider individual works. Wycherley's *Plain Dealer* appears to be more satirical than comic; *The Country wife* is more comic than satirical. It is difficult to say whether *The Way of the World* is a comedy or a satire. *The Egoist*, appears to be a satire though Meredith calls it a comedy; *Don Juan* is regarded a pure comedy though it is obviously satirical. The writer of comedy and satirist usually shifts from their grounds. The writer of comedy loses his moral neutrality and slips into satire, and the satirist occasionally loses his control over the reader and relaxes into comedy.

**The Method of a Satirist :** The satirist always intends to persuade his reader to share his own critical attitude. A person cannot be a satirist by simply telling the truth; he is a satirist when he deliberately compels men, through persuasion, to look at what they have tried to ignore, when he wishes to destroy their illusions and pretences, when he deliberately tears off the disguise and exposes the naked truth. But the satirist himself does not see the whole of truth, but only one aspect of it. "He is the advocate pleading a cause, and to secure our agreement he is prepared to ignore much of the evidence and exaggerate the rest. The satirist proceeds characteristically by drastic simplification, by ruthlessly narrowing the area of vision, by leaving out of account the greater part of what must be taken into consideration if we are to realise the totality of a situation or a character. In its extreme form we usually call this process caricature. It is fatal

to satire if the reader or the spectator should reflect that much might be said on both sides, or that if we knew all we might forgive all. It is of course, part of the satirist art to conceal from us that this simplification is taking place and he does this, as Dryden said of the author of a heroic play, by endeavouring to obtain an absolute dominion over the minds of the spectators." He can obtain this dominion by many different methods, by throwing dust in our eyes, by fascinating us with the verisimilitude of his presentation, by so delighting us with his art that we never pause to question argument." \*

All these methods have been very successfully used by George Bernard Shaw in inducing the English middle class to reconsider the moral assumption on which their opinions and conduct were based. He too, like other satirists, ignored the true nature of men, when he exposed the irrational, and abnormal. A satirist destroys what according to him, is false, unjust or impudent. He never produces a substitute. He destroys what is already there, and he does not necessarily offer to fill the vacuum that he has created. The satirist simplifies the truth because he presents only one aspect of it and presents it in an exaggerated manner.

Whether satirist is a pride person unaware of the complexity of human nature is a question that needs serious consideration. The question poses itself because a satirist habitually simplifies and exaggerates, because he deals with only one side of a question or one aspect of a man's character, because he is interested only in what he finds and never tries to ask himself how or why it came to be there. Famous satirists of the world Aristophanes, Persius, Ben Jonson, Dryden, Butler were men of strong minds. Jonson and Butler were subtle and had the perfect knowledge of below the surface things. Other satirists like Horace, Erasmus, Swift, Pope, Voltaire, Jane Austen, Flaubert, Shaw, Beerbhom are also very subtle. Their satire is delicate and sharp. It is but usual for a satirist to close his eyes to things that would be inconvenient for him to



take into account. The satirist is a sort of literary magistrate. He wants to uphold the order of civilised community in the literary world. He brings people to the test of certain social, intellectual and ethical standard. In assessing their degree of culpability, he may take mitigating circumstances into account, but he is not, as satirist, bound to do so and if he makes too many allowances he will end by writing something quite other than pure satire." Therefore a satirist by virtue of the limitation imposed upon him, is bound to neglect some aspects of the truth and to exaggerate what he thinks to be true. The satirist condemns the evil, the fault without taking into consideration the culpability of human nature or the rigidity of circumstances.

If the satirist functions as a literary magistrate, will any one take an interest in him? When we ponder over the fact that a satirist is only a demolition expert and does nothing in the field of creation, we become a little baffled to think about the future of satire. It appears worse when we remember Pater's views about the modern mind in his essay on Coleridge. According to him, the modern mind is distinguished from the ancient, 'by its cultivation of the relative spirit in place of the absolute spirit. "We have become aware of a world of gradations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we ourselves change, and as a result we are much less ready to make general observations and confident judgements. 'Hard and abstract moralities' Pater contended, are yielding to a more exact estimate of the subtlety and complexity of our life." If we accept Pater's view, what sort of future remains for the satirist? Do we have any sympathy with his drastic simplification of the facts?

Long ago Philip Sidney, in his *Defence of Poetry*, gave an answer to those who accused poets of being liars. He wrote that a poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lyeth..... Though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lyeth not." The similar answer can be given to those who object to the satirist because he presents partial, grotesque or distortion vision of life. The satirists business is to put his case effectively; and in order to do so, he has to magnify, diminish or distort the fact, and even to

cheat the readers. For him, the end always justifies the means. The satire is not meant for the literal minded people. It exists on two levels : overt and implied. It can function properly when the tact, imagination and intelligence of the satirist are met by a corresponding response from the reader. The unintelligent reader either does not read satire or misunderstand its importance. David Worcester has remarked in his *The Art of Satire*. "The spectrum analysis of satire runs from the red of invective at one end to the violet of the most delicate irony at the other." "To that we may add that the red of invective in now out of fashion, and that twentieth century satire relies more and more on the indirectness of irony, innuendo, fantasy and fiction of all kinds. The reader has to supply the positive from the satirist's negative, the desirable from the contemptible; he has to interpret the allegory, to understand the significance of the symbol, to realise the implications of what he has read. And to those who feel that the satirical vision is too crude for the delicate analysis of human relationships that we have come to expect in the novel, it may be answered that the ironical contemplation of a Jane Austen or a George Meredith is so detached and precise that it seems rather a judgement passed on the thing observed than a special mode of seeing. The distortion is not in the eye of the beholder, but in the object observed." \*

There is more need of satire than ever. The satirist condemns and encourages to destroy the whims and foibles, failures and faults. As we grow more gregarious and urbanised, we also grow more foolish and, under the influence of mass communication and propaganda, more subject to mass hysteria, to the follies and vulgarities of a mass culture. Peacock has hinted at this tendency in his novels and Mr. Evelyn Waugh has satirised some of these contemporary manifestations in his *The Loved One*. The modern satire has shifted from individual man to mankind. The main responsibility of the satirist is to save humanity from either complete extinction or fundamental change leading to loss of humanity, resulting from the abnormal growth of stupidities, vulgarities, injustice

and dishonesty. George Orwell has given a satirical expression to these collective evils, particularly political to utilitarianism in his "*Animal Farm*" and "*Nineteen Eighty Four*." The age offers plenty stuff for satirical writings because, though we know more than our ancestors, we are less wise than them and think less than our forefathers. The function of a satirist is quite different to-day from what it was a hundred years ago. Like Pope or Juvenal, he is concerned not only with the exposition of the moral turpitude but also with making his generation think and compel it to consider where it is heedlessly drifting, to urge his generation to be men and to take change of their destinies before it is too late. Satire has to play a very vital role in the twentieth century.

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## Restoration Satire and Satirists

### I

**The Restoration and the Satirical spirit :** The Restoration age becomes an age of satire due to multifarious influences. "A society where the various forms of worldly life are in the ascendant raises to its highest point the respect for conventional values; and while orthodox morality suffers an eclipse, fashion and genteel taste in return hold undivided sway. The rational tone of thought helps to disentangle and formulate all rules; and the clearness of principles renders their application more easy. Judging and condemning, as a result, grow more simple and more facile operations. In the exclusive circle of the cultured, the art of expressing one's judgement in literary terms becomes a highly natural exercise of the critical faculty; and the appeal to enlightened opinion is an unfailing means to acquire prestige and success."\*

With the Restoration of monarchy there breaks out an over all awakening and flourishing of instincts that have remained pent up for a long time. The age revolted not only against the puritan austerity but also against hypocrisy. There develops a spirit of mockery, fun and satire. The intellectuals of the day think it not only a duty to openly denounce false spiritual authorities; they do it for the sake of pleasure as well. The Restoration writers, Oldham, Butler and Dryden, wanted to bring in moral sanity in society. But they themselves enjoyed utmost freedom. Their audacity of thought and frankness of utterance had become a sort of cynicism. In these circumstances it is but natural for satire to grow and flourish. The Restoration satirists are often most often realistic and crude, just as they are bitter to some extent. The Restoration satirists are not very sure whether they are waiting in the name of morality and in its defence or against it. So the first reason for the growth and development of satire is that the spirit of the age encouraged the attitude of

mockery and fun towards Puritan austerity, ideas and institutions.

Secondly, political conflicts and strife of the time also account for the growth of the Restoration satire. The civil war and the Protectorate had known the most violent polemics. In the Restoration age the religious controversies automatically got themselves in political controversies. Milton himself fought this battle with pamphlets and treatises. Now in place of pamphlets and treatises, came out lampoons and satires whigs and Tories engaged in a paper war.

Thirdly, classical influences also encouraged the growth of satirical writings. They favoured a mode of expression which the tradition of the ages had consecrated. The satirist was honoured in the ancient days. The Restoration writers became familiar with and fond of Persius, Horace and Juvenal, the ancient classical satirists. These classical authors are translated and imitated. These ancient authors—Horace, Persius and Juvenal—attacked, through their art of satire the follies, stupidities and vulgarities and chased them out of society. The Restoration writers were also the lovers of wisdom and wanted to stave off hypocrisy, folly, vulgarity and indecency. The Restoration writers applied the ancient art and technique of satire and gave them a comparatively modern note. France has also helped the growth of satire in England and, for many a Restoration writer, Boileau was a favourite. Thus in England there is revived a scholarly and some what artificial style of writing, whose force is found in the work of Halland Donne.

The factor that contributed most to the growth of satire was that influence of classical literature. In this age of reason, satire was the most convenient mode to flourish. Dryden, the greatest literary figure of the Restoration age, was deeply influenced by ancient classical authors. He translated Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio, Lucretius, Virgil and other Roman writers. He imitated them and adopted their ideals of literary expression. He admired Juvenal thus :

“I must confess that the delight which Horace gives me is but languishing..... his urbanity, that is, his good manners

are to be commended, but his wit is faint; and is salt, if I may dare say so, almost insipid. Juvenal is of a more vigorous and masculine wit; he gives me as much pleasure as I can bear, he fully satisfies my expectation; he treats his subject home; his spleen is raised and he raises mine. I have the pleasure of concernment in all he says; he drives his reader along with him..... His expressions are sonorous and more noble; his verse more numerous, and his words are suitable to his thoughts-sublime and lofty."

Dryden had translated Latin satirists. He wrote a preface to the translation of Juvenal, in which he collaborated, which has received the name of *An Essay on Satire*. In this essay, he has compared Horace, Juvenal and Persius. Though he has expressed his great respect for the urbanity of Horace, yet he prepared Juvenal for the liveliness of his comic force and the vivacity of his style. In this essay Dryden has laid down the laws of satire in its literary purity. According to him, a satire comes very near a sermon and tends to become a purely artificial form. He was so overpowered by the classical ideal that he did not dare recognise the satires of Butler and Marvell.

"Whether sustained by a popular inspiration, and springing from the conflicts of social life, or the outcome of a reflective impulse, satire in England will enjoy until the close of the classical era a long and full life, rich in spontaneous fruits, and also in rather artificial products, according as the dominant influence is political hatred and aggrieved sentiment, or motives of abstract morality. Full of rank force and acidity under the Restoration, it will often disclaim any personal intent but almost always deal in personalities; and the relative sincerity of the satirical impulse will create new forms for itself, while infusing new type into the traditional forms."

Satire was a popular form of art in the Restoration and eighteenth century literature. The changes that took place in the social, political and religious life of the day naturally led to the reading, writing and appreciation of satire. Almost all the leading writers of the day adopt and excel in satire. Where writers like Clarendon merely lamented the breakdown of moral since the beginning of the civil wars, others like Dryden or Swift

took it upon themselves to castigate and ridicule modern behaviour. The Restoration commonalty felt some comfort in satire. These satirists acknowledged the presence of evil and stupidity in society which was invading the rest of the community. The king and his ministers, infact the whole courtly circle and sophisticated society of London were wallowing in the sensual luxuries and were ignoring the moral standards of behaviour. The reflective and scrupulous people were a little worried to see the royal and courtly mode of conduct spreading among the classes of society. These satires of the Restoration age convinced them of the existence of the moral values and standards of conduct. If the wits and their adherents were highly immoral there were men who were not afraid to denounce such behaviour. They felt that some one atleast was fighting on behalf of virtue and was denouncing all that was evil, stupid or vulgar.

## II

**Samuel Butler's "Hudibras"**—The greater poets of the Restoration period were Milton and Dryden, who represent two separate developments at the end of the Renaissance. Milton preserved the elevation and richness of the humanist intellect and Dryden developed the realistic, critical and sceptical tradition. The most eminent among the minor poets were Butler and Rochester. They were poets of distinction and permanent interest. Butler's contemporary reputation rested on "*Hudibras*" since most of his other works were first published in 1759, long after his death, and *Hudibras* is still his major work. A friend and a contemporary of Butler called the first part of the poem "the most admired piece of drollery that ever came forth." This was the common verdict of all people. A Drollery was an attack on Puritans. The complete poem consists of three parts, each part containing three cantos with "*An Heroical epistle of Hudibras to Sidrophel*" added to the second part and two epistles added at the end of the poem. *Hudibras* is a mock heroic. The poet has presented two anti-heroes: a presbyterian colonel and knight. Hudibras and the knight's squire, Ralpho an independent in religion. The two Hudibras and Ralpho remotely resemble Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, but their arguments over theology and church government are more vituperative than the chivalry of Cervantes' hero would have allowed. The action is less amusing now in its loose episodic flow

than it was in its own day. First part of the poem tells how Hudibras and Ralphe tried to stop bear-baiting in a western town. They win the first battle but afterwards are defeated and imprisoned. During his captivity, Hudibras falls in love with a widow's jointure land and so also with the widow. In the second and third parts he makes fruitless adventure to win the widow. In one striking episode he visits a Rosicrucian prognosticator, Sidrophel, a visit that ends in battle disastrous to second sight.

**The Purpose of the Poem :—**The purpose of the whole is obviously satirical, and the action simply a loose thread upon which arguments, reflections and portraits are strung. Butler sent a copy of Hudibras to his friend in India in 1663, accompanied by a letter which throws a good deal of light on the poem.

"It was written not long before the time when I had first the honour to be acquainted with you, and Hudibras, whose name it bears, was a West County knight, then a colonel in the Parliament army, and a committee man, with whom I came acquainted lodging in the same house with him in Holborn. I found his humour so pleasant that, I know not how, I fell into the way of scribbling, which I was never guilty of before nor since. I did my endeavour to render his character as like as I could which all that know him say is so right that they found him out by it at the first view. For his esquire Ralphe, he was his clerk and an independent, between whom and the knight there fell out such perpetual disputes about religion as you will find up and down in the book for as near as I could set down their very words. As for the story, I had it from the knight's own mouth, and is so far from being feigned that it is upon record, for there was a suit of law upon it between the knight and the fiddler, in which the knight was over thrown his great shame and discontent, for which he left the country and came up to settle at London. The other persons, as Orsin a bearward, Talgot a butcher, Magnano a tinker, Cerdon a Cobbler, Colonel a clown etc., are such as commonly make up bear-baitings, though some curious wits pretend to discover certain persons of quality with whom they say those characters agree; but since I do not know who they are, I cannot tell you



till I see their commentaries, but am content that every man should make what applications he pleases of it, either to himself or to others. But I assure you, my chief design was only to give the world a just account of the ridiculous folly and knavery of the Presbyterian and independent factions then in power and whether I have performed it well or not, I can not tell, only I have had the good fortune to have it generally esteemed so especially by the king and the best of his subjects."

From the letter we infer that readers made personal application of the characters and allegorical interpretations of the action. Hudibras and Ralpho are from life. But the author has coyly deprecated identification of minor characters of the poem with actual people. His chief aim was to expose the ridiculous folly and knavery.

**Methods:**—Butler's method in *Hudibras* is not quite uniform. His usual methods are burlesque and travesty. There one or are two passages of mock heroic, and many more in which he simply calls a spade a spade. His prevalent method is that of burlesque which aims at ridicule by way of diminishing and travesty. The economic, political and religious issues which divided England during the civil war are subjected in the opening lines of the poem to this levelling and diminishing process:

*When civil fury first grew high,  
And men fell out, they knew not why;  
When hard words, jealousies, and fears;  
Set folks together by the ears  
And made them fight, like mad or drunk,  
For Dame religion, as for punk.*

Burlesque has its own special virtues; it enables a satirist to strike with great force and confidence. But an extended burlesque becomes monotonous. It is also indiscriminate, falling alike on the just and the unjust. There are long grotesque characters of all the persons involved, there is author's comment by way of analysis or history; there are violent disputes between the knight and his squire. The knight is

*.....in logic a great critic,  
Profoundly skilled in Analytic;*

*He could distinguish, and divide  
 A hair 'twixt south and south-west side,  
 On either which he would dispute,  
 Confute, change hands, and still confute;  
 He'd undertake to prove by force  
 of argument a man's no horse;  
 He'd prove a buzzard is no fowl:  
 And that a lord may be an owl  
 All this by syllogism, true  
 In mood and figure, he would do,*

One of his more significant poems, it may be noted, is an unfinished "*Satire in two parts upone the imperfections of Abuse of Human learning.*"

**The Defects:**—*Hudibras* lacks structure and is only a series of desultory and drifting passages. Secondly, the author is too leisurely. He writes a dozen couplets where an accomplished author would have written only one to serve his purpose. He has described the beard of *Hudibras* in forty-lines and there are other dilated descriptions. But it is not unusual, considering the nature of the work and the age. Any thing was good for a laugh against Puritans, and the author had no need to restrain himself. Thirdly, he is often guilty of bad taste. Though he has the art of making bad-taste amusing, yet he goes too far. "His taste for unsavoury realism persists when he turns to burlesquing the arts of poetry, meretricious or otherwise. Here he maintains a vulgar anti-heroic, anti-poetic attitude towards his material. He loves to cheapen poetic imagery:

*The sun had long since, in the lap  
 of Thetis, taken out his nap  
 And like a lobster boiled, the morn  
 From slack to red began to turn.*

Since Chaucer's day at least this sort of thing has been good fun though the lobster is doubtless a bold stroke."

**The Appeal of 'Hudibras':**—The power of a burlesque lies in its externals and its subtlety, in the allusiveness of the text. Cheap editions of *Hudibras* show that it was liked not only by Charles II but also by the common people. It had a proletarian action but it also had in appeal to scholarly people.

He glances at cheapbook stories and at Homer and Virgil as well. It ridicules the pedantries of schools, the absurdity of astrology and the new science. It makes fun of the irrationality of synods and of the "inward light." The author was a learned man and the whole scope of his reading is drawn upon for themes, famous passages or methods of thinking and writing that might aid the burlesque. The poem shows Butler's remarkable gift for portraiture. "The schools of Dutch realism and French travesty meet in his work which anticipates and rivals the graphic art of his later illustrator, William Hogarth. His favourite classical satirist was Juvenal; but he owed awefully as much in theme and method to such moderns as Rabelais, Cervantes, and Scarron. Among English poets he is less a buffoon than he is a jester such as Shakespeare might have created in his later plays."

### III

**Social and Political Satire : Marvell, Oldham and Rochester :** The Restoration age is full of political satire. The domain of political satire is vast and crowded. Only a scholar after a thorough research of the period, can explore all its corners. Among these satirists and their works only great names and their powerful works are mentioned. The pamphlets and invectives, which abound in the period, are seldom mentioned.

The reputation of **Marvell** is higher to-day than it has ever been, partly on account of his satires and partly on account of other verses. The satires of Marvell have wit, outspokenness and indecency. Such poems, as *Instructions to a Painter* and *Dialogue between two horses* still startle us by their outspokenness and indecency. These qualities and, to some extent, wit, also appear in much of the verse collected in the various volumes of "*Poems on Affairs of State*". Through his satires, he made a series of attacks against the foreign policy of the King, and the scandals of public life and of the court. He circulated these pamphlets anonymously, either in the manuscript form or in the loose sheets. He tried to hide his purpose under the veil of allegories. "In a language of extraordinary raciness and a popular tone, with a raw realistic touch, the rage and shame of an England that has been humiliated enslaved, and contaminated by foreign vices

and fashions are here expressed. Such feelings were still exceptional, but their contagious influence was spreading obscurely. As if the new spirit in poetry supplied him with his instrument of expression, Marvell writes most often in heroic couplets; but his unpolished verse, capable of surprising vigour, has not the necessary suppleness, regularity, and rather reminds one at times of the simple ballad rhythms. The irresistible virtue of a lofty soul, of a heart embittered but obsessed by noble regrets and high thoughts, nevertheless imbues these strange poems with an energy of movement and phrase, an eloquence, that make them one of the most eminent examples of English political satire.”\*

**John Oldham**, “the English Juvenal,” is famous for his “*Satires upon the Jesuits*.” He was a strong and harsh talent. The literary aim of the writer and his tricks of phrasing have intensified the spontaneous vivacity of his passions. Because of his satirical temperament, he had some natural affinity with Juvenal. He translated and imitated Juvenal and Horace, but he put Horace into a more modern dress. All the satirical works were published within a period of six years. In these years, there was a good deal of excitement over the Popish Plot, and Oldham was naturally drawn to political satire. He was the foremost and most furious of those who fought on the side of Titus Oates and the Whigs. His “*Satyrs upon the Jesuits*” avoiding mock heroic narrative, made use of a dramatic monologue that gives high heroic eloquence but unfortunately lacks variety and change of pace in its vituperation. Besides these satires, he published a Pindaric ode under the ludicrous title “A satire Against virtue” in which, while pretending to glorify vice, he actually scourges rakes who glory in their viciousness.

Oldham has become comparatively unpopular in these days. The Reason has been pointed by James Sutherland: “Oldham was much read in his own day; but his effectiveness depended to a large extent on political and religious passions which had only to be touched, like an exposed nerve, to produce an immediate reaction. We have our own exposed nerves in the twentieth century; but the religious one appears to be

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\* Cazamian.

deadend, and our political troubles are of a very different order from those of the Restoration England."

**Rochester** was a vigorous and mordant satirist in the fields of philosophy, literature, manners and politics. "*Satyre Against Mankind*" and "*Upon Nothing*" are his best satires in the field of philosophy. In the *Satire Against Mankind* he has attacked both man and man's reasoning power. It has got a very impetuous beginning.

*Were I, who to my cost already am  
One of those strange, prodigious creatures man  
A spirit free, to choose for my own share  
I'd be a Dog, a Monkey or a Bear,  
Or anything, but that vain animal,  
Who is so proud of being rational.*

Here appears an extreme or childish misanthropy. The complacent praise of the nobility and divinity of Reason had been very common during the Renaissance. But such anti-rationalist utterances were common in the critical revulsion of the later Renaissance. Rochester had found a general suggestion for the form of his poem in Boileau's eighth satire; but the scepticism of reason comes from Montaigne. This attitude is quite common in England before 1675 but, before Swift, it was now here stated with such burning zeal as here. *Upon Nothing* excels in its ingenious and brilliant playfulness and cynicism. According to stories, creation is derived from an original universal something; Rochester ironically says that it starts from nothing :

*"Ere time and place were, Time and place were not,  
When primitive nothing Something straight begot,  
Then all proceeded from the great united-what."*

*Allusion to Horace's 10th Satyr of the First Book* is the most important literary satire of Rochester. This hasty and unpublished piece is personal satire rather than literary criticism. In this poem he has satirised the contemporary literary antagonists. He is also a critic of manners. In "*Letter from Artemisa in the Town to Cloe in the Country*," he has more smooth elegance of finish than in other satires and a more dramatic

power of depicting society. "Turbridge Wells" is significant for its remarkable realism. Those two poems and his other social satires tend to deal with the love-life of the Restoration times. Therefore, they are a little crude in matter and hasty and unpolished in manner. His political satires are remarkable for their blunt and obscene attacks on Charles II, his mistresses and advisers. "In most of these satires Rochester uses the heroic couplet with so natural a rough vigour and resonance that he takes his place high among the users of this metre, the tune of which a century after his death every warbler was to have learned by heart and to have made tediously commonplace. For Rochester the couplet is a flexible and exciting vehicle."

#### IV

**Satires of John Dryden :** Dryden's career as a satirist extends from 1681 to 1687, and he was over fifty when he wrote his great satires. Even here he was influenced by classical authors, particularly Juvenal, Horace and Persius. But he gave preference to Juvenal over all the rest. Before he arrived at this judgement after a deep and thorough consideration of the comparative merits of Persius and Horace. In the end, he prepared "to let Juvenal ride first in triumph", and gave second place to Horace. What Dryden admitted in Juvenal was his ability to declaim wittily and sharply, but he was equally convinced that the nicest and most delicate touches of satire consist in fine raillery, and in that Horace had no superior. Dryden's satires are both an invective and raillery. He was more influenced by Juvenal than Horace, because raillery, which is the excelling mark in Juvenal, appears to have come naturally to him, whereas the declamatory manner was one that he had to assume for the purpose of his satire.

The great political satires include *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Medal* and *Mac Flecknoe*, a literary satire born of politics. These satires are magnificent in their vigorous dignity, in their boisterous vituperation and their bitter satirical portraiture, though they are a little deficient in structure and are over weighted with prolonged scolding. After the excitement of the Popish Plot in 1678, there had been repeated attempts to force a bill through parliament excluding the catholics (and

thus the legitimate heir, the Duke of York) from the throne of England. The Chief Villain in these attempts was the Earl of Shaftesbury, the whig leader. In the summer of 1681, Shaftesbury was arrested and was accused of conspiracy against the monarch. At the suggestion of Charles II "Absalom and Achitophel" was written by Dryden and its publication was timed to fall just a week before Shaftesbury's futile arraignment. The poem makes use of the Biblical story to suggest how Achitophel (Shaftesbury) is tempting to rebellion Absalom (The Duke of Monmouth, illegitimate son of Charles II and the whig candidate to succeed his father. Since Monmouth had not yet rebelled, the poem lacks action, but not tenseness. It consists largely of satirical portraits and of eloquent argumentative speeches in Dryden's epical style. Satirical portraits are enlivened merely by political animus; the famous character of Zimri, however, is further spiced by personal pique, for for Villiers, Duke of Buckingham who is Zimri, had satirised Dryden as "Bayes" in the dramatic burlesque "The Rehearsal." The lines on Zimri

*A man so various, that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome*

are entirely among the most telling ever written in the vein of personal satire."

In March 1682, four months after the publication of *The Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden published '*The Medal*, another satire on Shaftesbury whose followers gave him a commemorative medal in honour of his victory, when he was released from the charges of conspiracy and treason. It is not so brilliant as is *Absalom and Achitophel*. It gains force because it is centred on a single person; but, in its satirical onslaughts, it is not so sharp. Thomas Shadwell, who had once been a close friend of Dryden, but now one of the most venomous of his personal and political enemies, published, two months after the publication of "*The Medal*, "*The Medal of John Bayes*", which proved a scurrilous and gossipy retort to the poet's second satire on Shaftesbury. In turn, a few months later, Dryden's opinions concerning Shadwell were published twice. First, in "*Mac Flecknoe*," written in 1678; secondly, in passages inserted by Dryden in Nahum Tate's "*Second part of Absalom and*

*Achitophel*." In his treatment of Shadwell Dryden at times drops his heroics and becomes very bitter and abusive. The picture of Og in Tate's poem begins :

*Now stop your noses readers, all and some,  
For here is a ton of midnight work to come,  
Og, from a treason-tavern rolling home.  
Round as a globe and liquorod every chink  
Goodly and great he sail behind his link.  
With all this bulk there's nothing lost in Og,  
For every inch that is not fool is rogue.  
A monstrous mass of foul corrupted matter  
As all the devils had spew'd to make the batter  
The midwife laid her hand on his thick skull.  
With his prophetic blessing: Be thou dull !*

The last three words- *Be thou dull* simply echo the theme of Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*. It is the most effective and the most influential poem of Dryden. It first appeared anonymously but was acknowledged by the poet in 1693. In 1678, Richard Flecknoe, a secular priest, known as a bad versifier, died. It came in the mind of Dryden to nominate Shadwell successor to the throne of Nonsense. Flecknoe who

*"In prose and verse was own'd without dispute  
Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute"*

chooses Shadwell to succeed him as the perfect nadir of genius:

*"The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But sh..... never deviates into sense.  
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike thro', and make a lucid interval;  
But sh.....'s geniune night admits no ray  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day."*

"satire on dullness of authors here reaches that high plateau of caustic and relentless phrasing, the other boundary of which might be Pope's *"The Dunciad"*, a poem clearly indebted to *Mac Flecknoe*, as were the works of other-poets and even dramatics, Henry Fielding among them. The *genus irritabile vatum* were embattled over matters of their art with an ardour that hardly can be seen in any other period. For Dryden these excursions into political and personal satire brought a swift



and abundant harvest of scurrilous abuse- and doubtless a considerable respect from intelligent and from Tory readers."

**The theory of Scholarly Satire:**—Butlers "*Hudibras*" is not a regular satire. It is simply a mock heroic poem, full of scornful irony. Andrew Marvell had little, even negligible, attention to traditional forms, and had deliberately brought his rough apologues within the range of language and instincts of the common people. Dryden, writing on behalf of the royal cause or in order to avenge himself upon his political or literary enemies particularly Shadwell, wrote satire according to prevailing literary conventions, Oldham, despite his political intentions, showed a greater respect for classical models than any other Restoration satirist, and re-established the tradition of Hall and Donne. "And yet the models of antiquity had never enjoyed greater prestige, nor exercised more attraction. If their effective influence has not been more constant upon the masters of the style at this epoch, it is because political inspiration, intermingling irresistibly literature with life, was directing the writer towards free and new forms, more in keeping with public sentiment, which had to be solicited."

Despite the contemporary influence on the form and style of satire the forms of antiquity and ancient classical authors were honoured by the Restoration satirists. Dryden the leading figure of the age, translated the Latin satirists. In his preface prefixed to the translation of Juvenal and which is famous in the name of *An Essay on satire*, he wrote about the general nature of satire and about the classical satirists. He has also made a comparison between Horace, Juvenal and Persius. According to it, there is greater urbanity in Horace but for the liveliness of his comic force and vivacity of his style, Juvenal is unexcelled. Despite his preference for Juvenal he followed the manner of Horace in his *Absalom and Achitophel*, as is shown in the character of Zimri.

Dryden did not approve of the personal element in satire. Lampoons, which were profusely written in that age, he said were dangerous weapon. And as a principle he disdained to reply when he was attacked. But everyone has the right to retort and to make examples of the vicious men. He laid down simple rules for modern satire. According to him, the subject

should be one; the poet should guard his readers against one vice; he should extol one single virtue; the tone should be lively and pleasant with due respect for good manners; the heroic line of ten syllables should be preferred to the short verse of "*Hudibras*." Finally the perfect model of this art of satire can be found in the "*Lutrin*" of Boileau.

Dryden has laid down these laws of satire in its literary purity. According to his definition a satire comes very near a sermon and tends to become an artificial form. It is on account of the overwhelming influence of the classical satire that he fails to recognize satirical inspiration, in the works of Butler and Marvell. He places his own "*Absalom and Achitophel*" in the line of Varro. The artificial kind which he recommended can only be saved from mere imitation by the (1) Systematic use of anachronism, and by (2) frank and strictly modernized adaptations of ancient themes. Rochester and Oldham attempted this method and was fully adopted by Pope.

"Classical influences favour a mode of expression which the tradition of the ages has consecrated. In ancient days the satirist was honoured, the study of the classics is now promoting familiarity with the works of Persius, Horace and Juvenal, these old masters are translated and imitated; did they not aim their shafts at the eternal enemies of wisdom and was the man of those days in any way different from the man of today? Before long, the contemporary mind awakes to the piquancy of anachronism, and of a suggestively bold application or of an adaptation that lends a happily modern note to the things of the past. Besides, satire is in fashion with the French, and Boileau is its brilliant exponent. Thus is revived a scholarly and somewhat artificial style of writing, that in England could claim the precedents of Hall and Donne."\*

### **John Dryden : Life and works**

John Dryden was born at Aldwinkle All Saints, Northamptonshire, on 9th August, 1631. His father, Erasmus Dryden, came of a fairly good family of Cumberland origin; there was a baronetcy, to which the poet would have succeeded had he lived long enough, in the family. It is

\* Cazamian

hoped rather than believed that Dryden was at Oundle grammar school as a small boy; one of the houses at the great public-school of Oundle bears his name. He afterwards went to Westminster, under the redoubtable Busby, and from there went to Trinity college Cambridge from where he took his B. A. in 1654. He never proceeded M. A., in the ordinary way, but was given a Lambeth degree in 1688. His university career was comparatively undistinguished, except for a conflict with the authorities, for which he had to apologize publicly to the vice-master of his college. His earliest poem was written when he was at school; its subject being the death of his school fellow, Lord Hastings. In this poem he attempted to out do Donne, the most prominent poet of the day and leader of the Metaphysical school of poetry. Critics have attached more importance to this poem of Dryden than has been attached to the poem of any other poet of Dryden's age. In 1654, his father died and left him a small estate. Soon after leaving Cambridge, Dryden went to London. For some time he acted as secretary to his cousin, sir Gilbert Pickering Cromwell's Chamberlain and one of his peers. Dryden's sympathies were with Cromwell, whose death he celebrated in a very fine poem. "*Astrea Redux*", in which he celebrated the Restoration, is not so good a poem, but no doubt was equally sincere, as Dryden, though no time-server, moved with the times and as a rule supported the powers which were in authority, irrespective of other considerations. Soon after the Restoration Dryden began to add to his scanty income by literary work of various kinds. He was called a hack writer by his enemies. But he was not a mere hack writer, because, by this time, he had already become a known and distinguished figure. In 1662, he was elected a member of the newly founded Royal Society. Only a person known for his social and intellectual merits could achieve such a distinction in those days. In 1663, he married the daughter of an earl, Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire and sister of his friend, Sir Robert Howard. The reputation of the lady was some what tarnished, whether justly or unjustly. His marriage does not appear to have been unqualified success, though there is no foundation for the stories which would prove it an utter failure. Soon after the opening of

the theatres in 1660, Dryden turned his attention to the writing of plays in order to earn some money for his living. In all he wrote some twenty-seven plays in a period between 1663 and 1664, commencing with *The Wild Gollant* published in 1663, and ending with "Love Triumphant" published in 1694. Dryden far too competent a writer not to put plenty of good work into this large *Corpus dramaticum*, but he was never quite at his best as a dramatist, because out of this bulky dramatic production he has scarcely left any dramas which are completely satisfactory. *The Rival Ladies*, published in 1663 was fairly successful. In 1664, he wrote "*The Indian Queen*", in Collaboration with his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. Then, a year after, he published "*The Indian Emperor*" singly. These plays were magnificently mounted. While the theatres were closed due to the Plague and the Great Fire, the poet had to retire to his father-in-law's seat and there he wrote two non-dramatic works of great importance. "*Annus Mirabilis*" and "*An Essay on Dramatic poetry*." The former is a poem in quatrains on the naval war with Holland the great Fire. The latter, is a defence of rhyme in drama and is admirable for its critical sagacity and for its easy and delightfull style. The "*Essay*" is written in the form of a dialogue between Eugenius (Backhurst), Lisideius (Sedley), Crites (Howard) and Neander (Dryden). His prose has got the quality of deceptive fluency and is difficult to imitate. As for his critical sagacity, few critics have possessed a better store or a more balanced mind. At this time some differences developed between him and his brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard; but nothing interrupted their amicable relations. His next drama was "*Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen*" in which Nell Guyn, the famous actress of the time, acted; it was closely followed, in the collaboration of D' Avenant, by a gross and stupid perversion of "*The Tempest*". At this time he made a countract with the kings Theatere to write for it three plays a year. But he could not fulfil the part of his bargain, though he derived a considerable profit from his share in the theatre. In 1670, he was appointed Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal, succeeding D' Avenant in the former and Howell in the later post. The salary for both the offices was £ 200 and a butt of Canary. At this time Dryden was solely confined to

producing plays. He wrote many plays, prologues, epilogues, and admirable critical prefaces to the plays. "*An Evening's Lore; or the Mock Astrologer*" appeared in 1668; "*Marriage a la Mode*" and "*The Assignment*" were published in 1672; "*The kind keeper, or Mr. Liberham*" appeared in 1678; The other plays that appeared in 1673 were "*Amboya*", "*The spanish war*" and "*The state of Innocence*," an operative version of *Paradise Lost*."

Dryden attempted the heroic play according to the prevailing fashion of the time. "*Tyrannic Love*" appeared in 1669 and the two parts of "*Conquest of Granada*" appeared in 1669 and 1700. Dryden's masterpiece in the heroic plays "*Aurungzebe, or the Great Mogul*" appeared in 1675. *All For Love* a heroic adaptation of the story of "*Antony and Cleopatra*" is Dryden's best play. This is the only play which he wrote to please himself. Dryden's version of "*Troilus and Cressida*" is not a very happy adaptation. His heroic plays were ridiculed in "*The Rehearsal*", written by the Duke of Buckingham, Sprat, Bulter and Others. Originally the play was directed to ridicule D' Avenant. But he died in 1688. Dryden, who succeeded him as the poet Laureate, became a butt for the noble and talented author of "*The Rehearsal*."

From 1681, Dryden started writing satires and became the greatest satirist of his time. "*Absalom and Achitophel*" "*The Medal*" and "*Mac Flecknoe*" are his famous political satires. "*Absalom and Achitophel*" is an attack on Shaftesbury and his policy of excluding the Duke of York from the succession to the throne. Its success was immediate and enormous. The writing of so many rhymed tragedies had made Dryden a skilled writer of the heroic couplet, which he wrote with unequalled vigour and spirit, and point. The poem is now appreciated for the graphic portraits of the eminent men of the time, rather than for its general scheme. Then, in 1682, he made another attack on Shaftesbury who was honoured by a medal after the charge of treason against him had proved false on account of these two poems. Dryden developed a violent quarrel with Shadwell, an inferior poet and dramatist, whom he attacked in "*Mac Flecknoe*", an admirable satire which inspired Pope to write his "*The Dunciad*", about forty years later. He contributed about two hundred lines to the Second Part of "*Absalom*

and Achitophel," mainly written by Nahum Tate. In 1682, appeared "*Religio Laici*", an able exposition of Dryden's views as a lukewarm member of the change of England. Some passages of this poem are very fine because, like Lucretius, he had the capacity to write in good verse even the non-poetical subjects. In 1685 appeared Dryden's two operas "*Albion and Alibanus*" and "*King Arthur*." Immediately after the accession of James, Dryden became a Roman Catholic. He was and is still criticised and condemned for having taken this step, but it is quite permissible to think that he did not do so by any mean motive. He was not a hero, and was inclined, like many of those who live to please, to follow the fashion in opinion and conduct, but he was not pusillanimous or a time server. It should also be remembered that even in his Anglican poem he expressed a desire for an infallible guide. He did not gain any thing from his Conversion, he never recanted and brought up all his Sons as fervent Catholics. All this proves that his Conversion was not actuated by some self-seeking or other base motives. He defended his new religion in "*The Hind and the Panther*", a poem in which a milk white hind represents the Roman Catholic Church and a fair, but spotted beast represents the Anglican Church. This poem, as a whole, was not very happily conceived and was ridiculed by Charles Montagu and Matthew Prior in a parody.

The Revolution of 1688 put an end to Dryden's regular income, because he did not enjoy the favours of the new monarch. He lost his posts of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal. It was much to his mortification that Shadwell, once his bitter enemy and much inferior to him in literary abilities was appointed to both the vacancies. He resumed his career as dramatist, though not with the same success as before. "*Don Sebastian and Amphibryon*" were produced in 1690, and "*The Love Triumphant*", his last play appeared in 1694. In his last years he increased his income by numerous translations. The old spirit of scholarship was dying and was being replaced by the spirit of *belles lettres*. A little less respect was given to his translations than to his original work. Dryden, in the collaboration of his son, published a translation of Juvenal and Persius in 1698 and that of Virgil in 1697. His translation of Virgil was regarded as a work

of national importance as a credit to English scholarship. It also fetched an income of £ 120<sup>0</sup> for the author. Dryden was so competent a craftsman that he could not fail in any task which he set himself, but he and Virgil were ill-mated, and his translation is not worthy of the original. His last book, "*Fables Ancient and Modern*", appeared in the year he died. These include the First Book of the "*Iliad*", eight tales from Ovid, three from Chaucer, three from Boccaccio, as well as other non narrative poems. Throughout the eighteenth century, the "*Fables*" were apparently the most popular of Dryden's poems. "*Alexander's Feast*" was written for a musical society in 1697, when it was separately published. His health gradually failed and gout attacked him early in 1700. He refused to allow the affected toe to be amputated and died at his house in Gerrard Street on May, 1, 1700. He was buried in poets' corner, Westminster Abbey.

"There are many more inspired writers than Dryden; there is perhaps no English writer who succeeded so well in so many different branches of writing. As a verse-satirist Dryden has no equal in any language. The best passages of "*Absalom and Achitophel*" are unapproached for the vigour of their satire, a vigour which is more pleasing than Pope's malignity. As a dramatist Dryden was never quite at ease, but plays like "*All for Love*" and "*Don Sebastian*" have never been equalled since, and make amends for the indecencies of his comedies and therodomontades of his heroic plays. As a master of metre, Dryden compares favourably with all our poets, except some of the greatest. As a writer of odes, Dryden stands high. As a translator, he is good though by no means perfect. Above all, he is a master craftsman, and his work makes a special appeal to all fellow craftsmen, to those who are men of letters rather than creative artists. Dryden has strong claims to rank as the father of modern prose. His prose is almost always a model, easy without being slipshod, dignified without being stiff. As a critic, he is always sound and interesting; it has been objected that he changed his mind too often on certain points of criticism, but this was because his mind was alive and receptive, but academic and contemptuous of change. There are heights which Dryden cannot reach; but he stands among the very best of those poets whose

appeal is to the intellect rather than the heart. He predominated over his age as much as Pope, Johnson or Tennyson and held a position as literary dictator which no one had held since, Jonson." (R. F. Patterson).

## Aspects of Dryden's Poetry

### I. Is Dryden a poet ?

It has often been doubted whether Dryden was at all a poet. The taste in poetry has changed so extremely in the nineteenth century that for many persons Dryden and his school practically were unreadable. But for an intelligent student of literature it is not true. Dryden is one of the most important poets in history of English verse, because he formulated a method for poetry that has appealed to disciples as different as Pope, Gray, Byron, Keats and Eliot, and that dominated English verse for two generations after his death. Doubts have been expressed whether he was a poet because nineteenth century condemned him and declared that his throwing over of emotion denied him the title of poet. The nineteenth century critics expressed these views and condemned Dryden because they were urged by the romantic theories and educated on these melodies of Keats or Shelley, just as Johnson, brought up and bred over the music of Dryden and Pope, considered the music of *Lycidas* as 'harsh'. Every critic is prone to be lightly influenced by the age in which he lives. Therefore it is no wonder that critics who were influenced by the melodies, of the Romantic Poets or of the Victorian lyricists condemned Dryden, the greatest literary figure of the Restoration period. Allardyce Nicoll has observed : "Beauty there must be in all poetry beauty and melody of diction that is the primal part of it; but in addition to that there must also be this power of generalisation, this ability to make permanent the evanescent trivial things of life, to give the atmosphere of universality to objects and to thoughts and to desires which otherwise would be but temporary and individual, with no significance to other men. This power Dryden shares with the greatest poets of our land.....Lacking emotion, disdaining, Dryden yet stands alongside our best poets. He is not only the representative of the age of the Restoration, the highest of a second-rate school of poets, almost denied entrance



into Parnassus. He is the poet of reason, just as Keats is the poet of emotion. There can be no question of rating the one above and below the other, for in the world of art many diverse forms and persons are equal. Shakespeare may stand alongside Homer. Dryden may meet on equal terms the finest and the most perfect poets of the passions."

Not Allardyce Nicoll alone, but T. S. Eliot, Mark Van Doren and Professor Verall have also defended Dryden from this superficial charge of the lack of poetic spirit and have also admired and appreciated his poetic achievements in the field of the poetry of Reason and meticulous metrical composition. According to George Saintsbury, the greatness of a poet lies in the supremacy in his own type of poetical expression. Thus, Dryden, being a poet of reason, is unexcelled by so many great poets. It is from this point of view that he has spoken highly of the poetic merits and achievements of Dryden.

"When we want to see whether a man is a great poet or not, let us take him in his common places and see what he does with them. Here are four lines which are among the last that Dryden wrote; they occur in the address to the Duchess of Ormond, who was, it must be remembered, by birth Lady Margaret Somerset.

*"O daughter of the rose, whose cheeks unite  
The differing tints of the red and white,  
Who heaven's alternate beauty well display,  
The blush of morning and the milky way."*

The ideas contained in these are as old, beyond all doubt, as the practice of love-making between person of Caucasian type of physiognomy, and the images in which those ideas are expressed are in themselves as well worn as the stones of the pyramids. But I maintain that any poetical critic worth his salt could without knowing who wrote them, but merely from the arrangement of the words, the rhythm and cadence of the line, and the manner in which the images are presented, write: "This is a great poet, and probably a greater poet, across them and that he would be right in doing so." When such a critic, in reading the works of the author of these lines, finds that the same touch is, if not invariably, almost always

present, that in the handling of the most unpromising themes, the *mots rayonnants*, the *mots de lumiere* are never lacking; that the suggested images of beauty never fail for long together; then he is justified in striking out the 'probably' and writing, "This is a great poet." If he tries to go further, and to range his great poets in order of merit, he will almost certainly fail. He cannot count up the beauties in one, and then the beauties in the other, and strike the balance accordingly. He can only say, "there is the faculty of producing those beauties; it is exercised under such conditions, and with such results, that there is no doubt of its being a native and resident faculty, not a mere casual inspiration of the moment; and this being so, I pronounce the man a poet, and a great one." This can be said of Dryden, and it can be said of Shelley, or Spenser, or Keats to name only the great English poets who are most dissimilar to him in subject and in style. All beyond this is a treacherous speculation.'

Sir A. W. Ward remarks in *The Cambridge History of English literature, Vol VIII.* that Dryden is an original poet and that his originality is essentially the originality of treatment. "Partly, perhaps, because his temperament was slow and reserved, and because his mind seems never to have been thoroughly at work till he had his pen in his hand, his genius was that which he describes as the genius of our countrymen .....rather to improve an invention than to invent themselves". Prof. Cazamian has remarked that Dryden, despite his attempts in many kinds of literature, was first and foremost a poet. He has exercised the widest influence through his examples and precepts.

## II. Representative character of Dryden's Poetry

The most remarkable thing about Dryden's work is its representative character. None is more representative of his age than Dryden in whole gamut of English literature. His work contains a faithful representation of almost all the important literary movements of the Restoration period.

Dryden is more representative of his age than any great man of letters of age can be. There are contemporaries of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Pope and Tennyson who do not

permit them to represent the age in entirety. They represent only a small part of their age. Dryden, alone, among all English poets, singly represents his age and the whole of it. George Saintsbury has observed. "Many as are the greatmen of letters who have illustrated English literature from beginning to the present day, it may safely be said that no one so represented his time and so influenced it as the man of letters whom we have been discussing. There are greater names in our literature, no doubt; there are others as great or nearly so. But at no time that I can think of was there any English-man who, for a considerable period, was so far in advance of his contemporaries in almost every branch of literary work as Dryden was during the last twenty years of the seventeenth century. To turn a satiric couplet of his own, by the alteration of a single word from an insult to a compliment, we may say that he, at any rate during his last decade

*In prose and verse was owned without dispute  
Within the realm of English absolute."*

It is on account of his relation to the men of his time rather than his intellectual and artistic superiority that his representative character is more remarkable. Other great men of letters, with the sole exception of Voltaire such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Tennyson represented only a small part of their time. With Dryden this was not the case. The majority of men of later days directly imitated him; poets, dramatists, critics and prose-writers, in his time; and after him, worked on the same lines and pursued the same objects. "The eighteen volumes of his works contain a faithful representation of the whole literary movement in England for the best part of half a century, and what is more, they contain the germs and indicate the direction of almost the whole literary movement for nearly a century more."

This representative character does not always belong even to the greatest men of letters of the time. Milton, for example, is not the representative poet of his age. There are other lofty figures, otherwise very popular and highly esteemed in the literary field, have failed to achieve this place of distinction. But Dryden is more representative of his age than Pope of the eighteenth century. He was often seen in Will's

Coffee house surrounded by the celebrated wits, intellectuals and poets of the time. Samuel Pepys, the great diarist, craved for the friendship of Dryden. He was always a domineering personality in conversation. He took an active interest in the social, political and literary problems of the age. This is why we find the oratorical tone ringing in every movement of his verse.

Dryden is the representative poet of the age because he assumed the leadership of almost all the literary movements and was the most accomplished writer of all the species of literature that emerged in the Restoration age. There have been many more inspired writers than Dryden: but there is perhaps no English writer who succeeded so well and so greatly in so many different branches of writing. As a verse-satirist, he has no equal in any language. As a writer of political satire, he is supreme. The best passages of *Absalom and Achistophel* are remarkable for their vigour of satire which is more pleasing than Pope's malignity. As a dramatist, he wrote all sorts of plays according to the prevailing fashion of the time. Though he was never quite at ease, yet plays like *All for Love* and *Don Sebastian* have never been equalled since, and make amends for the indecencies of his comedies and therodomontades of his heroic plays. As a master of metre, particularly the heroic couplet, he compares favourably with all great English poets. As a writer of lyrics and odes, Dryden stands high. "Above all, he is a master craftsman, and his work makes a special appeal to all fellow craftsmen, to those who are men of letters rather than creative artists. Dryden has strong claims to rank as the father of modern prose. His prose is almost always a model, easy without being slipshod, dignified without being stiff. As a critic, he is always sound and interesting; it has been objected that he changed his mind too often on certain points of criticism, but this was because his mind was alive and receptive, not academic and contemptuous of change." Thus we see that Dryden represents his age in almost all branches of literature.

Dryden was the representative of his age also in point of character. Prof. Saintsbury has observed: "Dryden was not only in his literary work a typical English man of his time and

a favourably typical one; he was almost as representative in point of character. The time was not the most showy or attractive in the moral history of the nation, though perhaps it looks to us not a little worse than it was. But it must be admitted to have been a time of shameless coarseness in language and manners; of virulent and blood thirsty party spirit, of almost unparalleled selfseeking and political dishonesty; and of a flattering servility to which in the same way, hardly any parallel can be found. Its chief redeeming features were, that it was not a cowardly age, and for the most part, not a hypocritical one. Men seem frequently to have had few convictions, and some times to have changed them with a some what startling rapidity. But when they had them, they had also the courage of them. They hit out with a vigour and a will which to this day is refreshing to read of; and when, as some-times happend they lost the battle, they took their punishment, as with perhaps some arrogance, we are wont to say, like English men. Dryden had the merits and the defects eminently; but the defects were, after all, in a mild and by no means virulent form. His character has had exceedingly hard measures since."

The most potent evidence of Dryden's being the representative poet of his age is that the Restoration Period is generally known as The Age of Dryden. Referring to this point A. W. Ward has written in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. "The Age of Dryden seems an expression as appropriate as any description of a literary period by the name of a single writer can be, and yet, in one sense, it is a misnomer. On the one hand, in the Chapter of English literary history which more or less covers the fifty years between the restoration, and the opening of the eighteenth century, not only is Dryden's the most conspicuous personality, but there are few literary movements of importance marking the period of which he did not, as if by right divine, assume the leadership, and which did not owe to him most of what vitality they proved to possess"<sup>4</sup>

### III. Dryden as a Satirist

In 1680 Dryden bade farewell, though only for a short time, to the writing of plays and began to take an active

interest in the political and religious affairs of the time. Tom Brown, in his *Reflections on the Hind and Panther* has written. "Is it not a great pity to see a man, in the flower of his romantic conceptions, in the full vigour of his studies on love and honour, to fall into such a distraction, as to walk through the thorns and briers of controversy?" This change meant a relief to Dryden from modes of expression which were not adapted to his disposition. He had become a little bored by writing plays for about twenty years. 'There are many reasons for his *départure* from dramatic to satirical compositions. Not all of the plays had been successful. Bayes says in *The Rehearsal*. "I gad, the Town has used me as scurvily, as the Players have done .....since they will not admit of my plays, they shall know what a satirist I am. And so farewell to this stage for ever." In 1676, Dryden had confessed to his patron, Lord Mulgrave, in his dedication of *Aurungzebe* that he had become weary of writing plays and had asked that the king be sounded on the question of an epic, because for writing an epic both leisure and pension were needed. In 1690, in the Preface to '*Don Sebastian*' he gave some reasons why he had left the stage a decade before. "Having been longer acquainted with the stage than any poet now living, and having observed how difficult it was to please, that the humours of comedy were almost spent; that the love and honour (the mistaken topics of tragedy) were quite worn out; that the theatres could not support their charges; that the audience foresook them; that young men without learning set up for judges, and that they talked loudest who understood the least; all these discouragements had not only wearied me from the stage, but had also given me a loathing of it." Thus we see that Dryden had to abandon the writing of plays in the face of so many discouragements; the chief of them being the unscrupulous and vituperative criticism by the literary quacks.

Besides, there were so many circumstances between\* 1674 and 1681 that impressed him. The court, which had served as a setting and justifications for the heroic drama, had begun to lose its significance; politics had grown more complicated than before and the formation of parties was almost imminent. In such circumstances journalism promised

new rewards to men who could effectively comment upon burning problems and topics. The Popish Plot had greatly excited even the common men of London; there were violent ups and downs in public fortunes. The climax of Dryden's career was co-incident with these new crises. The poems on public affairs which he wrote during the six years between *Absalom and Achitophel* in 1661 and *The Hind and Panther* in 1687 provided him with the best opportunities and deserve to be best known of his work.

During the closing years of his main dramatic career, Dryden usually expressed a violent devotion for those "abominable scribblers", the pamphleteers. The then pamphleteers of the country not only offended his sense of political propriety but pamphleteering as such offended his sense of the dignity of literature and poetry. In the mean time he had begun taking part in public affairs and had developed a public voice of his own. The prologues and epilogues, the controversial forefaces, rhymed tragedies and prose comedies had trained his powers of attack and had taught him that a great deal of damage could be done with cool, insulting analysis and loaded innuendo. All the while he had been discovering important new resources in the heroic couplet. The political satire was to be best expressed through this medium of expression. In the field of political satire, he made his debut with unexampled stores of energy and incorruptible literary conscience. He never treated the trivial or the feeble; instead he scorned them. "If a poem have genius it will force its own reception in the world." So Dryden wrote in the preface to *Absalom and Achitophel*. Secondly, he came in this field with an abiding sense of superiority and looked down upon the contemporary controversialists as well as the events that he treated in his satires.

Dryden, at his advent in the sphere of satirical writings, had no conspicuous principles of his own concerning the church or the state. Bishop Burnet has said that he had no religious convictions of any complexion; and, so far as political principles are concerned, he has been regarded as a turncoat. Dryden was a sceptic. He himself confessed that he was "naturally inclined to scepticism. Though he was converted

to Catholicism at the age of fifty four, yet he had no religious convictions. He did not possess any nicely distinguished or carefully pondered political ideas. Secondly, he never thought that principles, religious or political, are necessary to inspire a political satirist. He was simply a party writer. Thirdly, whatever principles regarding the church or the state he had, can not be called principles but prejudices.

Dryden hated and feared disturbance of any kind. He was a firm believer in order. Hobbes had taught to attach a peculiar value to "peacable, social and comfortable living," even at the cost of justice and general health. He was absorbed in the status quo. Whatever threatened to dissipate authority, he instinctively struck it and condemned it most vituperatively. He wrote in "*Absalom and Achitophel*:"

*"All other errors but disturb a state,  
But innovation is the blow of fate."*

He had no faith in the democratic values. Like Hobbes, he had his distrust of the multitude, "that numerous piece of monstrosity," as Sir Thomas Browne put it, "Which taken asunder, seem men, and reasonable creatures of God; but confused together, make but one great beast". He never believed that crowd had any sort of wisdom: it makes it lot worse

*The tampering world is subject to this curse,  
To physic their disease into a worse.*

He had full faith in the divine right of the king, but he had no faith in democracy. He wrote in his dedication of *All For Love* :

"Both my nature, as I am an English man, and my reason, as I am a man have bred me a loathing to that specious name of a Republick, that mock appearance of liberty, where all who have not part in the government are slaves, and slaves they are of a viler note than such as are subjects to an absolute dominion."

His sympathies were with the power. A priest who questioned the authority of the Church, or a politician who tried to damage the machinery of the state was an enemy of



mankind. This sort of outlook can be called neither reasonable nor noble; but it was consistent. Given a consistent outlook, it was necessary for a seventeenth century satirist that he should be a subtle scholar. Dryden was an acknowledged scholar of the classical and native literature. This is why he could write powerful satires and ratiocinations.

Whether Dryden had a satirical temper? In a letter that appeared in the *Gentle man's Magazine* in 1745, it is written that "Posterity is absolutely mistaken as to that great man (Dryden); though forced to be satirist, he was the mildest creature breathing..... He was in company the modestest man that ever conversed." It is also recorded that he had "a down look and could be easily discountenanced." He refers to his "natural diffidence" in the preface to the second "*Miscellany*" He wrote in the dedication of "*Troilus and Cressida*" : "I could never shake off the rustic bashfulness which hangs upon my nature." It is well known that he could not read his own lines aloud without hesitation and embarrassment. "He had something in his nature that abhorred intrusion into any society what so ever..... and, consequently, his character might become liable both to misapprehensions and misrepresentations. So wrote Congreve, Bishop Burnett said that he had 'monster of modesty;' George Granville defended him from this charge by writing that "modesty in too great a degree was his failing. He hurt his fortune by it, he was sensible of it; He complained of it, and never could overcome it." All this shows that Dryden lacked satirical temper. His power as a satirist seems to have issued solely from his words. He had mastered the satirical kind of expression just as he had mastered other kinds of expression. He did not hate any person bitterly; but he did harbour a sublime contempt into poetical compositions. He simply laughed at Shadwell. Like an average man he was never stupefied with rage in the face of idiocy or infamy. He knew very well that he could be a powerful satirist only if he gave an artistic expression to the contempt, folly or infamy of his contemporaries. He wrote in the preface of *Absalom and Achitophel* : "There is pride of doing more than is expected from us and more than others would have done..... There is a sweetness in good verse which

tickles even while it hurts, and no man can be heartily angry with him who pleases him against his will."

Critics distinguish mild and well-mannered satirists like as Varro, Horace and Cowper from rough and angry ones as Lucilius, Juvenal, Persius, Hall, Marston and Churchill. Dryden belongs with Juvenal; but he is not angry or rough. He liked Juvenal for the liveliness of his comic force and the vivacity of his style. His animus is controlled and his satirical surface is as smooth as worn stone. What he has in common with Juvenal is a huge thoroughness. Dryden appreciates Juvenal thus: "He fully satisfies my expectation, he treats his subject home.....he drives his reader along with him. ....When he gives over, it is a sign the subject is exhausted." These two qualities largeness and completeness are seldom found in a satirist together. Juvenal alone among the classical satirist had a singular combination of these qualities. Medieval satire had thoroughness; but it lacked distinction. The classical satirists, at the end of the Elizabethan age, were angry and rough; but they were not exalted or exhaustive. Denham, Marvell, Cleveland, though sincere and earnest, were ragged and hasty.

John Oldham was the first man who made a deliberate and cautious attempt to imitate the Roman satirists, particularly Juvenal. With satire in his very eye, he went to Boileau for form and passions. His "*satires upon the jesuits*", written in 1679, treated contemporary affairs with dramatic grandeur and swelling dignity. The Elizabethan satirists were not very specific; they also lacked grandeur. They could not be a source of inspiration for the Restoration satirists. Oldham for the first time, surprised his readers with remarkable force. Dryden was impressed by Oldham. It was from the "*Satires upon the jesuits*" and the "*Paradise Lost*", that he drew the stateliness of his best satirical poem "*Absalom and Achitophel*." "He added humour to Oldham's preponderating gloom, he modified Oldham's abruptness to directness, and he avoided the infelicities of rhyme and metre with which Oldham had thought to approximate the fervour of Juvenal. But the great original force of the man Dryden did not pretend or wish to modulate."

The satirical accent is ever present in Dryden. It is noticeable from the beginning of his literary career. Shadwell, in his "*Medal of John Bayes*" refers to Dryden's 'scurri- lous vein:'

*"At Cambridge first your scurrilous vein began,  
When saucily you traduced a nobleman."*

There are some strains of sarcasm in the "*Astraea Redux*".

*Thus Banished David spent abroad his time  
When to be God's anointed was his crime.*

The "Annus Mirabilis" comes dangerously near to disrespect of Charles when it says of him that he

*Outweeps an hermit, and out-prays a saint.*

In the prologues and epilogues of the various dramas, Dryden added steadily to his stock of satirical devices. During these stages of experimentation with satirical expression he came to learn "that Alexandrines are of little value in a form where the motion must be swift and regular; his major satires have seven altogether. He learns that the medial pause is the most telling in the long run; he perfects himself in antithesis and balance. He discovers that alliteration gives emphasis and helps to set the meter rocking. He sees that pyrrhic feet give speed and assist in making the transitions natural. He finds that the stressing of penultimates stamps out lines which are unforgettable.

He curses God, but God before *Cursed him.*  
The midwife laid her hand on his *thick skull.*  
With this prophetic blessing. Be *thou dull.*  
I will not rake the dunghill of *thy crimes.*  
For who would read thy life that reads *thy rhymes?*  
To talk like Do-eg and to write *like thee.*

And gradually he secures full possession of the secret which is to aid him in becoming the most famous of English satirists, the secret of the contemptuous character."

"Characters" are as old as literature, rather as old as human life itself. The summing up of the traits of the individual was primarily an instinct; later it became an art. With Theophrastus, it was simply a moral exercise. As a branch of

the satiric art, it was developed by the Roman authors, particularly Horace and Juvenal. Horace and Juvenal, of course, adopted different methods to sketch characters. Horace had a ridiculatory attitude towards the exposition of the follies of his Roman contemporaries. Tigellius, the Sardinian singer is laughably real and resembles Dryden's Zimri.

"This man never did any thing at a piece. One while he would run as if he were flying from an enemy; at other times he would walk with as solemn a pace as he who carries a sacrifice to Juno. Sometimes he had two hundred servants, sometimes ten. Now he would talk of kings and tetrachs, and everything great; now he would say, I desire no more than a three-footed table, a little clean salt, a gown to defend me from the cold. Had you given this fine manager a thousand sesterces, who was as well satisfied with a few, in five days his pockets would be empty. He would frequently sit up all night, to the very morning, and would snore in bed all day. There never was anything so inconsistent with itself." Dryden, before writing *Absalom and Achitophel*, had read Horace and had appreciated Tigellius, Rupilius and Persius, satirical characters created by Horace. Rupilius is introduced by a chain of epithets which anticipates Juvenal. Juvenal, in order to portray a ridiculous character, invented a series of scornful epithets. He describes a character through these scornful epithets, and not through action. His fourth satire is a gallery portraits, in the manner of *Absalom and Achitophel*, the various councillors who come to advise the king have been sketched in a ridiculous as well as scornful manner. Dryden followed the same practice.

'Characters', both types and individual, were profusely produced during the middle Ages and the Renaissance. All sorts of writers clerics, laymen, allegorists chronicles etc., were busy at portraiture. Dante is well known for sketching individual and Chaucer, for types. During the Elizabethan age, Greene and Nashe, portrayed rascals and rogues. Hall and Donne have contemptuously ridiculed the rogues and Coxcombs. In the seventeenth century, there was an extraordinary development in the art of character portraiture, both generalised and real. "The abstract Theophrastian 'character'

is now a well-known form of Jacobean and Caroline prose. The 'humours' of Ben Jonson were almost its starting point; Sir Thomas Overbury, Joseph Hall, John Stevens, John Earle, Nicholas Briton, Geoffrey Minshull, Wye Saltonstall, Donal Lupton, Richard Fleckno, and Samuel Butler handed it along, enriching it all the time with observation and humour until Addison and Steele, who also knew La Bruyere, and the French type, appropriated it for their Sir Roger de Coverley papers, and Fielding grafted on its stern 'his own Squire Western'. Dryden was familiar with all this. His special contribution was in the field of personal portraiture. During the Restoration age writers had begun to indulge in contemporary personalities. Interest in public affairs had developed prejudices and moral indignation. A satirical approach was bound to follow. Dryden's Absalom, Achitophel, Mac Flecknoe and Zimri are unforgettable satirical characters.

The origin of satire according to John Dryden was profane. It had its roots in reproach and raillery which accompanied the Roman festivals. But art improved the crude tone of satire as it originally was. The obscenity was eliminated. He decried vice and commended virtue. "Satire" says Dryden, "is of the nature of moral philosophy; he therefore, who instincts most usefully, will carry the palm. "But he modified his original stand in comparing Horace with Juvenal. Folly rather than vice is the proper subject and an object of ridicule for Horace. The will is only to be reclaimed in the wicked but the understanding is to be informed in the foolish. Besides he says, it is easy to call a person a scoundrel but difficult to make him appear a fool without using these appropriate names.

With these observations in mind, we can make a critical study of Dryden's satire and see if he has succeeded in his aims. He thought that his Zimri clearly exemplified his principles. He is careful not to emphasise the moral turpitude of his character. He concentrates on less serious vices of his victim, and, in this attempt, he succeeds almost to perfection. Every couplet of his successful satire has an air of finality about it when he has had his say, one feels that he has exhausted the subject. There appears nothing more to be said:

*Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong  
Was everything by starts, and nothing long.*

Or Achitophel:

*In friendship false, implicable in hate,  
Resolved to ruin or to rule the state.*

Or Ben Jochnan:

*Still violent, whatever cause he took  
But most against the party he for sook.*

Or Shadwell:

*But Shadwell's genuine night admist no ray  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.*

Dryden's victim is doomed for ever. There is no chance of raising his head after Dryden has written one of his couplets on him.

This quality has been attributed to Dryden's mastery of the heroic couplet. Admittedly the heroic couplet is the best possible medium for this kind of satire but so many other poets tried their hands at the same medium with very different results. There is a more satisfactory explanation necessary for his success. One of the reasons is his detachment from his subject. He seems to be so much above his target that one does not suspect any personal motives. There are, for example, no references to the private lives of his victims. One feels they are monuments of dullness and folly rather than Shadwell or Settle. Consider, for example, his satire of Doeg (Settle):—

*Let him be gallows free by my Consent,  
And nothing suffer, since he nothing meant  
Hanging supposes human soul and reason  
This animal's below committing reason.*

Dryden's Doeg does not even have the temerity to curse the Lord except when drunk, or, consider Og (Shadwell).

*Hadst thou the glories of thy king Exprest,  
Thy praises had been satire at the best.*

we feel that Doeg and Og are so much beneath him that it is a compliment to them that he takes any notice of them at all.

But even that does not explain the whole secret of Dryden's success. He has a very subtle way of attacking. He sometimes imagines his victim as a strangely incongruous figure. For most satirists the obvious thing is to make their

victim mean; to under rate and belittle seems to be the only way to ridicule him. But Dryden is very discriminating. He does not accuse every one of his opponents on the same count. Achitophel finds a unique treatment. He is:

*A fiery soul, which working out its way  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,  
And over informed the tenement of clay.*

This is a mode of attack that would occur to very few satirists indeed. Dryden achieves most unexpected results by using a favourite device of comic writers : incongruity. Flecknoe's last word to his son and successor are:

*Success let others teach, learn thou from me  
Pangs with out birth and fruitless industry.*

In contract to the author of Mac Flecknoe, Shadwell's predicament is:

*With whatever gall thou sett'st thy self to write  
Thy in offensive satires never bite.*

or

*And when false flowere of rhetoric thou wouldest cull  
Trust nature, do not labour to be dull.*

He emphasises not the danger but the bathos in shadwell's writings. Of course the tone in *Mac Flecknoe* is mock heroic. Dryden begins in an epic manner. He seems to be employing a heroic tone. Flecknoe is like Augustus, but his empire is over the realms of non—sense and stupidity. Shadwell is gifted with thoughtless majesty by nature; he is the last great prophet of tautology. The mock heroic tone is sustained throughout the poem. Flecknoe is the hoary prince and appears in a majesty on a throne reared of his own labours. Instead of a sceptre and a ball, the Emperor hands his successor a mug of ale. Twelve reverend owls fly at that auspicious occasion. The tone is consistent upto the very end. Not for a moment is the pose dropped. This is a master piece of the satiric art.

In the *Medal* and *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden wanted to ridicule popular opinion which is so capricious and undependable. Spenser and Milton, all realised this but they were only angered at it. They condemned the mob outright. Dryden

sees it with humour. He calls them the chosen seed of jacob. The English are like

*The jews, a headstrong, noody, murmuring race;  
As ever tried th' extent and stretch of grace;*

And again:—

*For governed by the moon, the giddy Jews  
Tread the same tract when she the prime renews  
And once in twenty years, their scribes record,  
By natural instinct they change their lord.*

Indisputably successful and sustained as his satire is, why is Dryden not admired by the reader in spite of the recent critical vogue in his favour? I think Dryden suffers from comparison with other poets. We are so used to poets who treat of the elemental, the passionate, the romantic that we are left dissatisfied by our reading of Dryden. But I think it is quite misleading to compare Dryden with writers of different genres of poetry. An appreciation of Dryden requires an understanding of his social values. We must recognise the imperative necessity of social order to be in sympathy with his point of view. If we do not recognize that Goneril and Regan and Iago and Claudius constitute a threat to the moral order we cannot appreciate Shakespeare's tragedies. Similarly, if we do not recognize the threat that Absalom and Achitophel constitute to the political order, we can not appreciate Dryden.

What is more, Dryden regards the villains as more powerful as Shakespeare does. Dryden believed that matter was in a dangerously disintegrated state before God eduved order out of it. The time when atoms were being hurled at each other blindly was not so distant in the past, or in the future for that matter. Men likewise was nasty brutish and short before society was evolved. Van Doren traces these two tenets of Dryden's belief to Lucretius and Hobbes respectively.

In any case the political state of the country was unstable enough to justify his beliefs. Having experienced the disasters of the Civil War he was a confirmed believer in order and he advocated loyalty to whatever sovereign reigned. His foudness for satire fits in with this. Satire is a social force. It is a



reaction to any aberration from order, normality and common sense. It treats of men at a social rather than at an elemental level. Consequently, while it does not go sufficiently deep, it compensates us by variety and subtlety for the absence of depth.

It is a very sophisticated form of humour, particularly when it sets out to arraign folly rather than vice. The appeal of Dryden's satire today is to the purist who seeks nothing but entertainment from literature. And it eminently succeeds in its purpose. His tone is contemptuous, ridiculous, incongruous, mock heroic, bathetic or indulgently humorous as the situation demands. If he condemns Doeg for writing verses that are clumsy and unpointed he is careful to see that he is never guilty of these faults himself. There is a finished skill in every verse of his satires; the more we laugh at the victim, the more we admire the author.

Dryden's theory of satire is inspired by a corrective purpose. Like Ben Jonson, he set out to 'whip the ragged follies of the time.' His ironic vision is born as a corrective to the follies of the age. But his satirical outbursts differ from those of Jonson, Butler, Pope or Byron. There is something Chaucerian in his character. Temperamentally he is a lineal descendant of Chaucer. This also justifies his passion for Chaucer and the consequent revival of Chaucerian tradition. Chaucerian attitude towards follies and stupidities of the age is not bitter; it is touched with concession and sympathy. Scott tells us, "While Dryden seized, and dwelt upon, and the evil features of his subject, he carefully retained just as much of its laudable traits as preserved him from the charge of want of candour." Though his political satires produced a good deal of sensation in England, yet Dryden should not be regarded only as a party man. In this respect, Sir Walter Raleigh has written, "The warfare of parties has raged on, with varying fortunes, for more than two hundred years since Dryden wielded his two-edged sword, and the honours are still divided. But it would be a mistake to regard Dryden as first and foremost a party man. No more party-pamphleteer has now, or ever could, win the place that he holds in English letters. He is of the centre; his party is the party of Aristot-

phanes and of Rabelais. His best work is inspired by the sanity that in habits at the heart of things. He lived in a turbulent age, and he was a fighter. But all extremists are his natural enemies. His weapons can be used, on occasion, by either side. He hated wrongheaded theorists and fanatics, who commonly impose their alliance, a heavy burden, on the reforming party in the state. He also hated all contented and self-sufficient dullards, who for the most part have to be supported, a grievous weight, by the party that stands for the established order. He makes war on both, with laughter that flashes and cuts."

"*Absalom and Achitophel*", if considered as a political and controversial poem, has all the excellences which is the subject is susceptible of: acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of characters, variety and vigour of sentiments, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers and all these raised to such a height as can scarcely be found in any other English satire. The poem has some defects as well. Some lines are inelegant and many are irreligiously licentious. The original structure is a little defective and the allegories are not perfect. The poem has another inconvenience. It does not admit imagery or description. *The Medal*, though written with the same principles gives less pleasure because it is upon a narrower plan, and because a single character or incident can not furnish as many ideas as a series of events or a great number of agents. Though less read than *Absalom*, it abounds in humorous and serious satire. The picture of Shadwell has been very skilfully delineated :

*The frauds he learnt in his fanatic years  
Made him uneasy in his lawful gears  
At best as little honest as he could,  
And like white witches, mischievously good.  
To his first bias, longingly he leans;  
And rather would be great by wicked means.*

Dryden was a better prose writer and versifier than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer. He had more strength of mind than Pope; but

he lacked Pope's refinement and delicacy of sentiment. His eloquence is equal to that of Pope. Though his *Epistle* are inferior to Pope's, his satires are definitely better. "His *Absalom and Achitophel* is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to anything of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine, and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice." (Hazlitt) Pope derived the idia of *The Dunciad* from Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*. The difference between Dryden's satirical portraits and Pope's is that the former seems to grapple with his antagonists and to describe real persons, while the latter seems to refine upon them in his own mind, to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the more drivelling effusions of his spleen and malice.

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## Didactic note in Dryden's poetry

Besides being the greatest satirist of England, Dryden is one of the great didactic poets of his age. The Roman gravity and intellectual quality of Dryden's art, evident in his two religious poems : "*Religio Laici*" and "*The Hind and the Panther*." They are a layman's refutation of all the specious arguments against revealed religion. Dryden believes that man's reason is too weak to judge of religious truths. In the first part he tries to examine all the objections that a deist has to offer. He sums up the Deist's position :

*Thus man by his own thought to Heaven would soar;  
And would not be obliged to God for more."*

If the religious truths could have been arrived at by reason alone, the great pagan philosophers would have reached them. But seeing that their subtle minds failed to see the truth, there was an obvious need for revelation. His arguments against Deism and the other heresies summarised in prose sound very common but it is not the depth of his reason that we admire. Dryden is a master of expression. It is the simple clarity and the wit with which he puts his arguments that we admire. He employs many similes, none of them very remote or far-fetched. They are expressed generally with in a single line and yet the effect is one of having convinced us completely. When the interpretation of the *Bible* was left at the mercy of the rabble.

*The tender page with horny fists was gauled,  
And he was gifted most that loudest bawled.*

In the hands of the daily rising sects, the texts were explained not by study by fasting and by prayer, being, "occasioned by great zeal and little thought." For his part, he is prepared in all humility to accept the interpretation provided by "the few by nature formed, with learning wrought." He does not think that only men of wit will be saved. He hopes to be saved by believing in what these, better qualified than he, decide for him. The things we must believe in are few and

plain In doubtful questions, the safest course is to bow in humility to what the unsuspected ancients say.

In "The Hind and the Panther" Dryden presents the religious controversies of his day very neatly of course there is no question of being either objective or profound. He makes the position of the 'panther' very ridiculous. While she has chosen to be a beast of prey, she is yet too gentle to associate with the bloody Bear, the buffoon Ape, the false Reynard and the other heretical sects.

*Her faults and virtues lie so mix'd that she  
Nor wholly stands condemned, nor wholly free.*

Her dubious virtue is that she has been nice in her choice of ill and is the least deformed because the least reformed. But that makes her situation paradoxical, even untenable:—

*For how can she constrain them to obey,  
Who has herself cast off the lawful sway?*

She can not deny to any sect the right to be independent of her control when she has insisted on her right to be independent of the Roman church. Dryden has nothing to say about the moot points of theological differences. He dismisses every objection in such a facile manner that for a time his position seems to be quite irrefutable:—

*As long as words a different sense will bear,  
And each may be his own interpreter  
Our airy faith will no foundation find  
The word's a weather-cock for every wind.*

Again the necessity for an established church is to be taken for granted, just as in his political satires, the necessity for stability and order is to be taken for granted. Once we accept that, what he says is unassailable. What he never cares to prove is the desirability of this established church. But of course he did not set out to be a theologian. He is an artist and he puts his position very cleverly indeed. He has a felicity of phrase that is difficult to match this kind of writing. What he says of Luther is so funny that he gives his reader no chance to examine if it is true. The Jolly Luther, who allowed the full fed Mussalam to guide him to heaven decided:—

*To grab the thorns beneath our tender feet,  
And make the paths of paradise more sweet,  
Be thought of him a wife e'er half way gone;  
For 't was uneasy, t'availling alone.*

*Dryden has nothing to say against liberty except  
"More liberty begets desire of more  
The hunger still increases with the store."*

It does not prove either that the store should be limited or that hunger is undesirable but that we discover only if we examine it coldly. As we read we are carried away by this facile argument by analosy.

The Panther acknowledges that the church of England accepts both real virtue and sacrament. The real as expounded by her, says the Hind, reminds her of Aesop's fable where some one took the shadow for the meat. She does not say why it is better to believe in transubstantiation than in consubstantiation. The Panther asks her straight if she thinks the doctrine of Papal infallibility comes from heaven or from Rome. The Hind is more convincing when she parries than when she replies :

*Because philosophers may disagree  
If sight be emission or reception be  
Shall it be thence inferred I do not see ?*

Tradition, the Panther says, must be supported by scripture to be respected to the same degree. But you think that you alone can interpret the scripture, says the Hind, and thus claim the infallibility for yourself which you deny to me. Thus stated in prose the argument is weak and so are most of the other arguments.

Dryden's main objection to the church of England and the other reformed sects is that the private spirit is misleading. He thinks it is very unscrupulous to flatter the common man into thinking that he can interpret for himself. The unfortunate strength of these reformed churches lies in the fact that everyone considers

*On his own reason it is safer to stand,  
Than be deceived and damned a second hand.*

He fears the dangers of enthusiasm which may be roused in the public by any eloquent knave. He ridicules the hedonism of the reformed sects, extols catholic asceticism, stresses the sanctity of tradition, depicts the forgiving and fearless nature of the Hind, as against the ungreatful and suspecting nature of the Panther and all this very artistically, but there is not one subtle thought that has not occurred to the intelligent reader before and not one bold image that the lay reader of poetry has not met before.

Referring to these religious poems, Prof. Cazamian has remarked: "His (Dryden's) didactic poems rank among the most successful examples of a thankless kind; the vigour of his genius, the gift which he possessed to a supreme degree of reasoning and arguing in verse, and his religious zeal newly awakened to a more intense life, raise the debate above the arid plain in which controversy most willingly lingers. "*Religio Laici*" owes to the concentrated force of virtue reflection a singular, grave, and noble beauty, animated at moments by a philosophic ardour, while a restrained imagination adds to the whole the subdued glow of a lyricism that is purely moral. More ample and more explicit, the ingenious symbolism of *The Hind and the Panther* is not free from reproach; the main theme—that of all fables—the merging of the animal world in that of man, is carried at times to that paradoxical degree where the idea can no longer be kept from clashing with the images rather loose in its texture, the poem is not free from prolixity. But while Dryden takes sides, and can not remain impartial, he spares the dignity of Anglicanism, which he had just before upheld, and makes a sincere effort to be fair. The clearness of the thought, the direct energy of the expression, the smooth movement, the robust quality of the maxims coined by the poet in his effortless manner, the rhythm, regular but not monotonous; graceful or pleasing episodes, a fresh and, as it were, powerfully naive sincerity, a nervous and subtle argumentative skill, which the poetic cadence sustains and does not appear in any way to hamper, all make of this unequal work one of the eminent expressions of Dryden's genius."

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## Dryden's Heroic Couplet

"But let it be said again, the story of Dryden's conquest of English poetry for the most part is the story not of his material but of his manner. It is the story of a poet who inherited a medium, perfected it by long manipulation, stamped it with his genius, and handed it on. That medium was heroic Couplet Verse."

Mark Van Doren : *"John Dryden : A Study of His Poetry"*

Dryden once said, 'the genius of our countrymen is rather to improve an invention than to invent themselves. The invention that was improved by Dryden was the heroic couplet. His main concern was an artistic expression. The heroic couplet was not a new thing in the hands of Dryden. It had been patronised by great poets for long narrative poems as well as for general use. Chaucer wrote in couplets and Marlowe frequently used free couplets. But the heroic couplet is the development of an intellectual age.

The utility of the heroic couplet had been established for all time by Chaucer, the father of English poetry. Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare had made different uses of it at the end of the sixteenth century. Hall, Lodge, Marston and Donne had used it in their satirical writings. It had become more and more popular during the early years of the seventeenth century. "It had begun to adapt itself to the type of mind which Dryden represents long before he became of age poetically. This adaptation involved a number of characteristics, of which the end stop, the best known, was only one; the others were a conformation of the sentence structure to the metrical pattern, a tendency towards polysyllables within the line, a tendency towards emphatic words at the end of lines, and a frequent use of balance with pronounced caesura. The end stop, and the modification of sentence structure to suit the length of measure, made for pointedness if not for brevity, and



provided in the couplet a ratiocinative unit which served admirably as the basis for declarative or argumentative poems. The polysyllables made for speed and flexibility, and encouraged a Latinized, abstract vocabulary. The insistence upon important words for the closing of lines meant that the sense was not likely to trail off or be left hanging; and the use of balance promoted that air of spruce finality with which every reader of Augustan Verse has long been familiar."

It has not yet been settled and is very difficult to settle when and in whom the couplet first reached the near-perfect stage. Stages of development in the present form of couplet can be traced in France from Malherbe, whose formula for perfect rhetorical poetry called for a cacsura, cutting every verse into two equal parts. Dryden wrote in the dedication of the "*Aeneis*": "As for the pauses, Malherbe first brought them into French within this last century; and we see how they adore their Alexandrines." In England, such a formula was never contrived. But in the first half of the seventeenth century the principles, like those of Malherbe, began to shape the form of the couplet. The first adventures were made by a number of poets who could never perfect it and who are almost obscure. Dryden has mentioned the name of Edward Fairfax, the translator of Tasso's "*Godfrey of Bulloigne*", as the earliest reformer of English versification. He has declared Waller as the poetical son of Fairfax in the Preface to "*Fables*". Dryden wrote couplets which come very near to Dryden's. Drayton's "*England's Heroical Epistles*" afford the best examples. And Drayton was an Elizabethan; the fact proves that many Elizabethans could write good Augustan verses. Spenser used the couplet in "*Mother Hubbard's Tale*." The closing couplets of Shakespeare's sonnets are curiously like those Dryden and Pope, as here :

*For we, which now behold these present days,  
• Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.*

The Elizabethan satirists, though clear in tone and expression, could not make their felicity of expression much contagious. Jonson's influence on seventeenth century poetry was immense and he was, to a great extent, responsible for the growth

and popularity of the heroic verse. But his influence was on diction not on meter. Beaumont wrote many of his poems in the heroic couplet which, later, became models of sweetness and clarity. George Sandys wrote in heroic couplets but they lack uniformity and briskness. Milton wrote four of his Cambridge poems in the couplet. Sir Philip Sidney's couplets are like the couplets of Dryden. But it was Waller who was declared, by the Augustans as well as the contemporary critics, the father of seventeenth century heroic couplet. Waller's contributions to the perfection of heroic couplet have been rather exaggeratedly enumerated by Atterbury in the preface to Waller's Poems. He writes: "Before his time, men rhymed indeed, and that was all; as for the harmony of measure, and that dance of words which good ears are so much pleased with, they knew nothing of it. Their poetry then was made up almost entirely of monosyllables; which, when they come together in any cluster, are certainly the most harsh, untuneable things in the world..... Besides, their verses ran all into one another, and hung together, throughout a whole copy, like the hooked atoms that compose a body in Descartes. There was no distinction of parts, no regular stops, nothing for the ear to rest upon.....Mr. Waller removed all these faults, brought in more polysyllables, and smoother measures, bound up his thoughts better, and in a cadence more agreeable to the nature of the verse he wrote in; so that where ever the natural stops of that were, he contrived the little breakings of his sense so as to fall in with them; and, for that reason, since the stress of our verse lies commonly upon the last syllable, you will hardly ever find him using a word no force there."

Cowley's poems written and Cleveland's political satires written in the heroic couplet proved very important for Dryden because, though lacking smoothness and swiftness, possessed the quality of momentous directness such pauseless lines as these

*Encountering a brother of the cloth,  
Who used to string their teeth upon their belt,  
Religion for their seamstress or their cook,*

gave Dryden his metrical cue.

Dryden wrote altogether, over a period of exactly fifty years, some thirty thousand heroic couplets. Thus he sustained the stream of English verse for half a century. His achievement is that he used heroic couplet for miscellaneous forms of poetical compositions prologues, epilogues, lyrics, narratives, argumentative poems, satires, ratiocinative poems and religious verses. Through the heroic couplet, he learned to say any thing he liked to say, high or low, narrow or broad. Dryden used the heroic couplet for every form of poetical expression. It became a natural form of utterance for him. He wrote in the Preface to "*Fables*": "Thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose; I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit, and become familiar to me."

Dryden's main contribution to English prosody was that he perfected the heroic couplet. In this connection Wad has observed. "By the time of Dryden almost the whole province of English prosody had been consciously or unconsciously explored, through no ordnance map of it had been even attempted, and very large districts had not been brought under regular cultivation. It life, to change the metaphor, had passed from the stage of infancy in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to an almost premature state of accomplished growth at the close of the last named, but had gone through a serious fit of disease in the fifteenth. It had recovered magnificantly during the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth, and, within this time, had practically, though not theoretically, completed the pioneer exploration above referred to. But certain dangerous symptoms had recurred in the break down of blank verse, in the roughness of the satirists, in the flaccidity of the heroic enjambed couplet; while the great tonic work of Milton, unlike that of Chaucer, was not at once appreciated, though, perhaps for that very reason, it had a deeper and more lasting effect. The immense increase of range which had been given by the practice of the various stanzas, of lyrics, of octosyllables, of one other curious development yet to be noticed and, above all, of blank verse, had seemed, sometimes, to overpower the explorer's sense of rhythm and metrical

proportion to afflict them with a sort of prosodic vertigo. Either Milton or Shakespeare would have been a hazardous specific for this, in as much as neither and more specially, not Shakespeare used a technically rigid. Versification, Nothing has ever been devised probably nothing ever could be devised so efficacious for medical purposes in this condition of things as the stopped heroic couplet."

It is Dryden who gave the heroic couplet its firm establishment: Had Pope done to couplet what Dryden did to it, if would not have achieved its present firmness. Dryden like Pope, had no attachment to the heroic couplet. In this connection Prof. Ward has observed: "To say that this couplet could not have received its actual firm establishment without Dryden would, perhaps, be less philosophical than to say that the necessity of its turn necessitated the arising of a poet like Dryden. If Pope and he had changed places, it is pretty certain that the domination of the form would have been much shorter than it actually was. For Dryden had by no means Pope's attachment to the couplet, the pure couplet and nothing but the couplet; and his own form of it was much affected by precedent poetry, thereby, as it were, gearing the new vehicle on to the old. He took from Fairfax and Waller the sententious trap of the stopped measure; he took from Cowley the Alexandrine licence with its powers of amplification and variation; he took perhaps from no body particular—the triplet with its similar reinforcement. He early adopted the use of the same word, emphatically repeated in different places of consecutive or neighbouring lines so as to give relief to the unvarying smoothness and the clockwork balance of the strict Wallerian type. Above all, after he wrote his first batch of couplet poems near the time of the restoration itself, and before he wrote his great satiric and didactic pieces in the same measure twenty years later, he had an enormous amount of practice in it through his heroic plays. The actual poetic value of them does not here matter at all. A man of Dryden's metrical gift could not have written even ten or twenty thousand nonsense verses without becoming a thorough master of the metrical capacities of his instrument. But, as a matter of fact, little as the couplet may be suited to the necessities of

the stage, those necessities themselves force it to display capacities which it would not otherwise show."

Dryden mastered the art of versification while he wrote play about a decade before he wrote his master political satires. One may laugh at the clumsy verses of his plays, particularly of "*The Indian Queen*", "*Tyrannic Love*", "*The Conquest of Granada*" and "*Aurengzebe*". But had he not written these plays, particularly in the verse they are written, Dryden's couplet would never have attained the astonishing and unique combination of ease and force, of regularity and variety, which it displays in "*Absalom and Achitophel*" and "*Mac Flecknoe*", in "*Religio Laici*" and "*The Hind and the Panther*"

Referring to Dryden's contributions to English prosody, Prof. Saintsbury has observed: "The wonderful command over the couplet of which he had displayed the beginnings in his early poems, and which had in twenty years of play writing been exercised and developed, till its owner was in as thorough training as a professional athlete, was the first of these. The second was a faculty of satire, properly so called, which was entirely novel. The third was a faculty of specious argument in verse which, as has been said, no one save Lucretius has ever equalled, and which, if it falls short of the great Roman's in logical exactitude, hardly falls short of it in poetical ornament, and excels it in a sort of triumphant vivacity which hurries the reader along, whether he will or no. All these three gifts are almost indifferently exemplified in the series of poems now under discussion, and each of them may deserve a little consideration before we proceed to give account of the poems themselves.

"The versification of English satire before Dryden had been almost without exception harsh and rugged. There are whole passages of Marston and of Donne, as well as more rarely of Hall which can only be recognized for verse by the rattle of the rhymes and by a deligent scansion with the finger. Something the same, allowing for influence of Waller and his school, may be said of Marvell and even of Oldham. Mean while the octosyllabic satire of Cleveland, Butler and others, though less violently uncouth than the decasyllables, was

purposely grotesque. There is some difference of opinion as to how far the heroic satirists themselves were intentionally rugged. Donne, when he chose, could write with perfect sweetness, and Marston could be smooth enough in blank verse. It has been thought that some mistaken classical tradition made the early satirists adopt their Jaw-breaking style, and there may be something to be said for this. But I think that regard must, in fairness, also be had to the very imperfect command of the couplet which they possessed. The languid cadence of its then ordinary form was unsuited for satire, and the satirists had not the art of quickening and varying it. Hence the only resource was to make it as like prose as possible. But Dryden was in no such case. His native gifts and his enormous practice in play writing had made the couplet as natural a vehicle to him for any form of discourse as blank verse or as plain prose. The form of it too, which he had most affected, was specially suited for satire. In the first place this form had, as has already been noted a remarkably varied cadence; in the second, its strong antithesis and smart telling hits lent themselves to personal description and attack with consummate ease. There are passages of Dryden's satires in which every couplet has not only the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The rapidity of movement from one couplet to other is another remarkable characteristic. Even Pope, master as he was of verse, often fell into the fault of isolating his couplets too much, as if he expected applause between each, and wished give them for it. Dryden's verse on the other hand strides along with a careless olympian motion, as if the writer were looking at his victims rather with a kind of good humoured scorn than with any elaborate triumph."

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## Dryden's Literary Craftsmanship

Dryden is the greatest writer of the Restoration age, both in prose and verse, and one of the greatest writers in English literature. His reputation rests mainly on the artistic excellence of his literary output. His literary achievements and his literary qualities were not, rather could not be, ignored by the age in which he lived and the succeeding generations have ever been reluctant to belittle his literary personality or underestimate his literary achievements. Instead, the method of poetry formulated by him has appealed to disciples as different as Pope, Gray, Churchill, Byron, Keats and T. S. Eliot. This method dominated English verse for two generations after his death. More than any of his contemporaries, he is entitled to be called the father of modern English prose. So far as English verse is concerned, though certain improvements were made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he is equally dominating. Congreve, one of the best appreciators of Dryden, said that he was equally excellent in verse and in prose. It is very difficult to dispute the truth of the saying. Dryden is a towering personality both in prose and poetry. When one sets out to enumerate the names of great English poets, one cannot miss the name of Dryden. His verse displays his chosen metrical instrument, the heroic couplet in the fulness of its strength. He is equally efficient in the use of blank verse. As a dramatist he used blank verse with notable effect. He had the like command over lyric measure from that of the Pindaric Ode to those suited to the subtle madrigal or simple hymn. In this connection Prof. Ward has observed in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*: "One pre-eminent quality of his verse the infinitely varied and always rightly judged distribution of movement in the line or couplet or stanza can hardly be termed a metrical quality only. It depends largely on sureness of tact, rapidity of insight and absolute self. Confidence in the rejection of all means not leading directly to their end. Whether extreme passion or

profound emotion—whether love, hatred, anger, contempt, exultant joy, poignant grief—calls for expression within the limits of the line or couplet, immediate room, precise place, exact emphasis is found for each word or clause. And the economy is not less striking than the abundance in this feast of words. There was, in the days of Cowley, plenty, enough; but the dishes were ill sorted; Dryden knew how to forego of sweeping in. The poetic instrument remains wholly in instead the service of the player's hand; and, on each occasion, it seems to give forth in perfection the music which that occasion demands".

The style of early prose-writings of Dryden is largely influenced by that of Corneille while that of his later prose-works; by Montaigne's. His prose combines with an unprecedented ease of flow and a forcible directness common to all he wrote, a lucidity of arrangement and a delicacy of *nuance*. All this is due to the influence of contemporary French literature. It is very difficult to estimate Dryden's influence on the contemporary and succeeding writers of prose literature. He was an undisputed model for his contemporaries and immediate successors. Malone has said that the style of Burke was originally in some measure founded on that of Dryden. Burke himself appreciated Dryden and his style resembles more to Dryden's than to any other English writer.

Dryden's contribution to the various literary species is not insignificant. In one way or another he furthered the growth of every branch of literature. As a verse satirist, he has no equal in any language. As a dramatist, though he himself never felt quite at ease, his later plays have never been equalled since, and make amends for the indecencies of his comedies and therodomontades of his heroic plays. As a master of meter, Dryden compares favourably with all English poets. As a writer of odes and lyrics, Dryden stands high. As a translator, he is good, though not perfect. Above all, he is a master craftsman, and his work makes a special appeal to all fellow. Craftsman and to those who are men of letters rather than creative artists. He has indisputable claims to rank as the father of modern English prose which is almost always a model "easy without slipshod, dignified without



being stiff" As a critic, he is sound and interesting. "It has been objected that he changed his mind too often on certain points of criticism, but this was because his mind was alive and receptive, not academic and contemptuous of change. There are heights which Dryden can not reach, but he stands among the very best of those poets whose appeal is to the intellect rather than to the heart. He predominated over his age as much as Pope, Johnson, or Tennyson, and held a position as literary dictator which no one had held since Ben Jonson." Referring to Dryden's contributions to a large variety of literary species, Ward has observed: "His plays, taken as a whole, form the most notable chapter in English dramatic literature after the doors of the theatres had been once more flung open at the Restoration. In his non-dramatic verse, he left scarcely any kind of poetry unattempted except the epic proper in which, had his heart's wish been fulfilled, he would have challenged comparison with the great poet (Milton) who had survived into a 'later age' and to whom to political or religious differences precluded Dryden from paying an unstinted tribute of admiration. But he essayed, with marked success, a less adventurous flight in narrative poetry, and, in didactic, he created what may be termed a new form of its satirical division, political satire (with a literary subsection) in verse, in which, by means of his uncomparable gallery of characters, he excelled all that sought to rival him on his own ground. His didactic poems proper are among the most successful attempts ever made to carry on the arguments of the schools in polished metrical form; but it is to their satirical element as much as to their lucidity that they owe their general freedom from tediousness. His shorter didactic and satirical pieces—largely taking the shape of prologues and epilogues—often partake, after their kind, of the *vis viva* of his longer satires. His lyrics, in their varied excellence, complete the roll of his poetic achievements."

Prof. Ward is of the opinion that the epithet 'glorious' instead of being attached to Dryden's name, can be appropriately attached to the literary powers and products of Dryden. Dryden's originality was essentially the originality of treatment, not of ideas. His genius was, as described by himself 'the

genius of our countrymen.....rather to improve an invention than invent themselves'. This is because his temperament was slow and reserved. "And his poetry—unless in isolated places where the feelings of the individual man burst the bounds: the feeling of shame in the ode *To Anne Killigrew*; the feeling of melancholy, mingled with a generous altruism, in the lines to Congreve the feeling of a noble scorn for what is base and mean in some of his satire; the feeling of the sweetness of life and youth in a few of his lyrics—touches few sympathetic chords in the heart." It lacks the capacity to transport the reader to regions of terrestrial oblivion 'where soul speaks to soul.' Dryden did not attempt it. His conception of art and its practice was different from those of the Elizabethans or Romantics. He wrote :

"The same parts and application which have made me a poet might have raised me to any honours of the gown, which are often given to men of as little learning and less honesty than my self."

Yet it would be unjust to say that Dryden lacked poetic sensibilities, though he never claimed to possess them. The appeal of his works is to intellectual rather than to creative artists. In this reference Prof. Ward has remarked. "What he did, he did with the whole strength of one of the most vigorous intellects given to any poet ancient or modern, with constant generosity of effort, and, at the same time, with masculine directness and clear simplicity of purpose. And, though the work of his life is not marble without flaw, yet the whole structure overtops the expanse of contemporary English literature like the temple shining from the Sunian height over the sea."

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## Absalom and Achitophel

### I. Genesis of the Poem : Background and Occasion—

Absalom and Achitophel is perhaps, with the exception of *An Ode to St. Cecilia*, the best known of all Dryden's poems. It was published in 1681. It came to the aid of the king at a grave constitutional crisis, when the Whig party, under the leadership of the Earl of Shaftesbury tried to secure that Charles II should be succeeded on the throne, not by his brother, a Roman Catholic, but by his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, a Protestant.

Charles II was restored to the throne of England in 1660. In May 1662, he married Catherine Braganza, but he had no issue by her. After a period of seventeen years when they had no hope of being blessed with a daughter or son, the question of succession to the throne began to assume prominence. In the event of king's having no legitimate child, the crown would revert to the Duke of York, the King's brother. The Duke of York was a Roman Catholic. The Earl of Shaftesbury wanted to nullify the claims of the King's brother, the Duke of York, for the throne of England by endeavouring to pass a law to the effect that the crown should not be inherited by a Catholic. Thus indirectly he supported the King's natural son, the Duke of Monmouth. The two parties were formed, supporting the case of one or the other. John Churton Collins has summed up the position of the two parties: "The one party insisted on the exclusion of the Duke of York from the right of succession, on the ground of his religion. These were the petitioners, afterward nicknamed Whigs and the exclusionists; their leader was the Earl of Shaftesbury. The other party, strongest among the churchmen and the aristocracy, were anxiously, partly in accordance with the theory of the divine right of Kings and the duty of passive obedience, and partly with an eye to their own interests, to please the King by supporting the claim of his brother. These were the Abhorrrers, afterwards nicknamed Tories." The Whigs sup-

ported the case of the Duke of Monmouth, the King's illegitimate son and the Tories supported the case of the Duke of York, the King's brother.

The exclusionist or the Whigs aimed at inflaming and exciting the people of England against the Roman Catholic religion. Titus Oates did his best to spread all sorts of rumours among the people, the most inflammatory being that the Catholics were indulging in a criminal conspiracy to kill the king and restore Catholicism in England. People of England readily believed every article of Oates's lies in view of the fact that Charles II had some secret dealings with the king of France. The leading principle of the Whigs, led by the Earl of Shaftesbury, was to inculcate among the people a hatred for the Duke of York and Popery. Shaftesbury launched a plot to secure the succession of the Duke of Monmouth, the natural son of the king, by Lucy Walters. With this subject he attempted to gain the confidence of the people and of the king. Excitement flared up among the people. The Exclusion Bill, which laid the provision that Roman Catholics can not succeed to the throne of England, was passed by the House of Commons on November 11, 1680 but was rejected by the House of Lords. In this tense situation, England was on the verge of a Civil War. In this delicate and critical situation, the Parliament was dissolved in January 1681. The Whigs, who had mustered public opinion in their favour to a considerable degree, became abnormally excited and did their best to faze the excitement among the people. Consequently, the Parliament was summoned to meet at Oxford. The king feared a Civil War and decided to make the Earl of Shaftesbury the worst victim of his contempt and fury. The Earl of Shaftesbury, called 'the arch-enemy of public peace' by Churton Collins, was arrested in July and thrown into Tower to await trial at the Old Bailey. He was charged with treason against the crown and peace of the people.

The Whigs were trying to mobilize public opinion with the help of pamphlets in order to pressurize the verdict of the Jury in favour of Shaftesbury. Towards the end of the year, Shaftesbury was to be brought before a Grand Jury for his trial against the treason. At this time, probably on the behest

of the king, Dryden set to write a 'poem in opposition to the flood of pamphlets stating the Whig Case. Dryden was to uphold the legitimacy of the Duke of York's succession to the throne and to condemn the case of the Whigs, particularly Shaftesbury. The publication of 'Absalom and Achitophel' about the middle of November is an obvious evidence that the poem was written to influence the trial of Shaftesbury. But this poem, which was to prove the greatest political satire in English Language, though actuated by contemporary sentiments and currents of thought, was destined to achieve a popularity that lasted for all generations to come. Christie has observed that Dryden produced this poem "probably with the deliberate object of inflaming public opinion against him and helping to obtain a condemnation"; but the poem gained and retained ever after a place among the national classics of England. Raleigh tells us: "I do not remember any other case of a pamphlet designed to achieve a particular end, pointed to the occasion, topical and allusive in every line, which gained at once, and retained ever after, a place among our great national classics."

The Earl of Shaftesbury was released from the charge of treason by the Grand Jury on 24th November 1682. His followers stuck a commemorative medal in hour of his triumph. The occasion furnished Dryden with the subject of his second satire *The medal* which was published in March 1682. This poem less brilliant than its predecessor, gains force from its being centred on a single person, Shaftesbury. Shadwell, a follower of Shaftesbury, made a scurrilous reply and wrote "*The medal of John Bayes*". In turn a few months later, Dryden's opinions concerning Shadwell were published twice; first in *Mac Flecknoe* and secondly in passages inserted by Dryden in Nahum Tate's *Second part of Absalom and Achitophel*. Christie has written about Dryden's contributions to the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*: "A small portion was by Dryden, the bulk of the poem being the production of Nahum Tate, who afterwards translated the Psalms into Verse, and became in time poet laureate. Dryden contributed two hundred lines, and, perhaps, revised the whole of Tate's work."

It is almost indisputably acknowledged that Dryden wrote '*Absalom and Achitophel*' upon the suggestion of the king,

with the deliberate object of inflaming public opinion against Shaftesbury and helping to obtain a condemnation. It was Tonson, who, in the second decade of the eighteenth century, initiated the traditional account of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* with this note: "To the Reader. In the year 1680, Mr. Dryden undertook the poem of *Absalom and Achitophel*, upon the desire of the king Charles the Second." The view has been endorsed by almost all the critics. W. D. Christie said that, not only the poem, but even the subject was clearly suggested by the king. According to Ian Jack, "Dryden was asked by the king himself, to write a poem in opposition to the flood of pamphlets stating the Whig case"..... A note prefixed to the 1716 edition of the second Part of *Absalom and Achitophel* is our authority for believing that Dryden's poem was undertaken upon the desire of the king Charles the Second. Whether the king indicated the sort of the subject he wanted or left the choice to Dryden is unknown."

Wallace Maurer of the Ohio State University, in his valuable dissertation, has examined the possibility of the poems being written upon the desire of Edward Seymour. His deductions of such a possibility are based on a letter written by one Richard Mulys to some one in the Duke of Ormond's household on November 19, 1681, a day or two after the appearance of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. Maurer writes: "Dryden, editors and critics on the whole have favoured Tonson's explanation of the genesis of the poem; but for want of decisive information, they have always done so with caution. Giving cause for continued caution is the following letter, which, written by one Richard Mulys to some one in the Duke of Ormond's household a day or two after the appearance of Dryden's *Absalom*, attributes to a personage other than the king the suggestion made to Dryden that he write the poem:

"1681, November 19, London—This day I have sent by the way of Mr. Anders on a small box with a quart bottle of syrup of figs from Mr. Edmund Waller to her Grace; in the same box is a book of Mr. Flatman's humbly dedicated to his Grace, which Mr. Flatman and Mr. Knowels pray you to present, and apologise to Mr. Flatman's behalf for the

presumption of his dedication without first having his Grace's permission. I also here send you Mr. Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel* wherein is honourable mention of my Lord Lieutenant and also of my late Lord (The Duke of Ormond and his son the Earl of Ossory). *The piece was write as I am creditably informed at the instance of our great minister, Mr. Seymour, but that is a secret to your self.* Pray help forward the enclosed to my brother.

"No writer on Dryden, to my knowledge, has discussed, Richard Muly's statement attributing the origin of *Absalom and Achitophel* to the prompting of Dryden by Edward Seymour."

Really Maurer's statement has never been given any significance by critics, nor has the letter of Muly's, quoted above, been discussed properly, though it has been occasionally mentioned here and there. Keith Fielding has made the mention of Muly's letter in his *History of the Tory Party: 1640-1714*; Hugh Macdonald has also mentioned this letter in his valuable book *John Dryden: A Bibliography of Early Editions and of Drydeniana*. But neither Fielding nor Macdonald has explored any connection between Seymour and Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*.

Despite an apparent neglect of the letter as an evidence in favour of establiſhing a connection between Seymour and Absalom and Achitophel, Wallace Maurer does not rule out the possibility of Dryden's writing the poem at the instance of Seymour. He writes: "So we must, atleast, continue to be cautious about accepting the tradition linking King Charles II with the composition of *Absalom and Achitophel*; of course, we should incline toward Seymour, we would not know exactly what he offered Dryden. But certainly a contemporary rumour that Dryden wrote *Absalom and Achitophel* 'at the instance' of Edward Seymour should not be dismissed as preposterous in the present state of our knowledge."

Whether the poem was written at the instance of the king or Edward Seymour, is not very material for a student of literature today. The point of interest for him is that Dryden became very conspicuous by uniting politics with poetry in

that memorable satire, and that a poem which was designed to achieve a particular end, topical and allusive in every line gained at once and retained ever after a place among the great national classics of England.

## II. The form and structure

"*Absalom and Achitophel*" is the most popular political satire in the English language. The satires of the Restoration period were influenced by the ancient classical and contemporary French models. Butler's "*Hudibras*" is not regular satire; it is simply a mock heroic poem, full of scornful irony. Marvell had paid little attention to classical forms and had written his rough apologues deliberately in the language of the people. Dryden too did not care much for the classical form. It was Oldham who, despite his political intentions, had taken care to respect the classical models of satire. Yet the classical model of satire was greatly venerated. If the influence of the classical model was not constant upon the master-satirists of this period, it is because political excitement forced them to deviate from the classical ideals and write in the contemporary French form and style. In spite of an overwhelming influence of the contemporary French literature and native socio-political life, the forms of antiquity were not less honoured. Dryden, the towering figure in the field of satire as in other fields of literature had shown his interest by translating Latin satirists. In his "*Essay on Satire*" he has made a comparison between Horace, Juvenal and Persius. He expressed his preference for the liveliness of his comic force and the vivacity of style, though he had a feeling of esteem for Horace for his urbanity. In his "*Absalom and Achitophel*" he has preferred to follow the manner of Horace, as is shown in the character of Zimri. "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily ! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a block head, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms."

Dryden condemned the personal element in satire because he was, led moralizing dignity and Christian charity. He said that lampoons were a dangerous weapon. He himself laid down some rules of satire which are : "the subject should be one; the poet must put us on our guard against one single



voice, must extol one single virtue; the tone shall be lively pleasant, with due respect for good manners; the heroic line of ten syllables, a more ample measure, shall be preferred to the short verse of "*Hudibras*". Finally, the perfect model of this art can be found in "*Lutrin*" of Boileau."

Dryden has laid down certain laws of satire in its literary purity in the *Essay on Satire*. Satire, as defined in this essay comes very near a sermon, or a moralising piece of literature. This is all because of the influence of the ancient classical authors. Judging from their standard, Dryden has failed to recognize the satirical elements found in Butler, Marvel and, to some extent in his own writings. Very modestly, he places his 'Absalom and Achitophel' in the line of Varro. "The artificial kind which he recommends will only be saved from imitation by the systematic use of anachronism, by frank and strictly modernized adaptations of ancient themes. This will be Pope's method, and already Rochester and Oldham have essayed it. But Dryden thinks that he ought to repress the guilty inclination which carries the modern reader towards Parody; if in his Juvenal this 'fault which is never committed without some pleasure' has not always been avoided, it is a licence wherein he excuses himself, and which he reproved in principle.....In fact, he does not take very great pains to avoid it".

"Absalom and Achitophel" as said by Dryden, is classical in form. It is a political satire. As a political satire, it is unequalled in English literature, rather in the whole of European literature. In this connection Prof. Ward observes: "Absalom and Achitophel" veils its political satire under the transparent disguise of one of the most familiar episodes of Old Testament history, which the existing crisis in English affairs resembled sufficiently to make the allegory opposite and its interpretation easy. The attention of the English public, and more specially that of the citizens of London, with whom the decision of immediate political issue lay, was sure to be arrested by a series of characters whose names and distinctive features were borrowed from the Old Testament; and the analogy between Charles II's and David's early exile and final triumphant establishment on the throne was a commonplace

of Restoration poetry. Indeed, the actual notion of an adaptation of the story of Achitophel's wiles the 'Picture of a wicked politician was not new to English controversial literature; in 1680 a tract entitled "*Absalom's conspiracy*" had dealt with the supposed intentions of Monmouth; and a satire published in 1681, only a few months before Dryden's poem, had applied the name Achitophel, with some other opprobrious names, to Shaftesbury."

Despite this Biblical parallelism, *Absalom and Achitophel* remains the greatest political satire in English literature, because it is frankly political and does not intend to convey a general impression of the vices and follies, defects and extravagances of a particular section or party. The speeches of Absalom and Achitophel are political, full of the reminiscences of past and schemes for the future politics. Dryden has clearly indicated that the conflict had been with many a conflict of political theories and not merely a question of persons.

*Absalom and Achitophel* is a political satire in a different way from "*Hudibras*". *Hudibras* is medieval, "*Absalom and Achitophel* is modern; In *Hudibras* religion predominates over politics, in '*Absalom*' politics predominates over religion. The difference is due to the lapse of time as well as due to the difference in plan. At the time, Dryden wrote his poem the fervour for religion was vanishing. The author of "*Hudibras*" had no definite project in his mind. But Dryden wrote *Absalom* with a view to achieve a particular purpose; he had a definite project in his mind. It was a plot to bar the succession of James and put in his place the Duke of Monmouth.

Referring to the blending of the Biblical and political elements in a classical form in *Absalom and Achitophel*, Cazamian has observed: "The matter of Dryden's satirical work is not original. No theme was more generally familiar for the purpose of satire than the utilization of Biblical personages and scenes. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer likened Monmouth to Absalom; 1681, a satirist had dubbed Shaftesbury on Achitophel. In this ready made frame, Dryden displays all the classical power of form. Aided by a clear and well thought out plan, his construction acquires an architectural quality, which English literature, leaving Milton aside, had offered

few examples since the instinctive creations of Shakespeare ; though the intellectualised art of Dryden, to tell the truth, does not quite re-discover in its integrity the intuitive secret of the logic of life. Despite an inner order, and true progression, the poem betrays some uncertainty, a development that is not balanced in every part. But the details are worked in by a touch that is broad and free, with a wonderful infallibility. A rich concrete verve plays with the trick of anacronism, and extracts from it all the relish of its effects ; the irony of the satire, at times indulgent and fraught with good nature, at others much more severe, controls the action, and groups the figures and their movements into one general irresistible suggestion. The innate goodness, the beneficent majesty of an indulgent king, radiate from the work, penetrating the reader and winning his sympathy ; behind the attractive but misguided son, and bathed in a doubtful light of ridiculous or ominous hue, stand the crew of the tormenters of revolt, dominated by the equivocal, mobile countenance of the evil counsellor. This energy of persuasion is further enhanced by the argumentation of the story, and by the speeches, in which every thing with admirable unity converges to the same end."

### III

#### **Absalom and Achitophel : a master-piece of satire—**

"*Absalom and Achitophel*" is a masterpiece of satire. It is the best known of all Dryden's poems. The sketch of the Popish Plot, the character and speeches of Achitophel, the portrait of Zimri and the final harangue of David have found their place in every book, either for general or school use. "There had been nothing in the least like this before. The prodigality of irony, the sting of the tail of every couplet, the ingenuity by which the odious charges are made against the victim in the very words almost of the phrases which his party were accustomed to employ, and above all the polish of the language and the verse, and the tone of half-condescending banter, were things of which that time had no experience. The satire was as bitter as Butler's, but less grotesque and less laboured."—(Saintsbury)

Whether or not at the request of Charles II, Dryden had found great literary opportunities in 1680. He had been

writing dramas for a period of twenty years, which had given him mastery over the most powerful metre, and in the prologues and epilogues he had expressed the satirical ideas. He made of this opportunity in a spirit different from that of hired bravos and spiteful writers of pamphlets and lampoons. He has unconsciously prepared himself for this opportunity when he wrote dramas. "It was in the nature of things, and in accordance with the responsiveness of his genius to the calls made upon it by time and circumstance, that in a season of great political crisis, he should have rapidly perceived his chance of decisively influencing public opinion by an exposure of the aims and methods of the party of revolution. This he proposed to accomplish, not by a poetic summary of the rights of the case, or by a sermon in verse on the sins of factiousness, corruption and treason, but by holding up to the times and their troubles, with no magisterial air or dictatorial gesture, a mirror in which, under a happily contrived disguise, the true friends and the real foes of their kind and country should be recognized. This was the "Varronian" form of satire, afterwards commended by him, with a well warranted self. Conscience, as the species, mixing serious intent with pleasant manner, to which, among the ancients, several of Lucian's, "*Dialogues*" and, among the moderns, the *Encomium Moriale* of Erasmus belong."

#### (a) Ironic Vision

The study and understanding of Dryden's ironic vision constitute the most important aspect of Dryden's satire. For this we have to go straight to his "*Essay on Satire*" prefixed as a preface to his translation of Juvenal. The temper of satire was a matter of great interest to him, as we learn from this essay. In this essay he has written a long comparison of Juvenal with Horace and Persius, has referred to the satires of Boileau and has said something about his own. He did not rank himself with the great Latin satirists, but he made it clear that he knew where his methods differed from those of the ancient Roman and contemporary French satirists and that he was not unwilling to be placed in their company. The part of the *essay* deserves to be quoted :

"The nicest and most delicate touches of satire consist in fine Raillery. How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily ! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms ! neither is true, that this fineness of Raillery is offensive. A witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. The occasion of an offence may possibly be given, but he can not take it. If it be granted that in effect this way does more mischief; that a man is secretly wounded, and though he be not sensible himself, yet the malicious world will find it for him. Yet there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as *Jack Ketch's* wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself if the Reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of *Zimri* in my "*Absalom*" is in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough. And he for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly. But I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of Blind sides, and little Extravagancies : To which, the writer a man is, he is generally the more abnoxious. It succeeded as I wished, the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began to frolic."

It is easy to rail. There had been plenty of railing in the earlier English satire. But fine railing is different from simple and coarse railing. Dryden has said in the same essay: "Satire is a poem of a difficult nature in itself, and is not written to vulgar readers". Dryden was never in favour of giving expression to derogatory contempt in his satire. Satire, according to him, is a witty expression of the follies and defects of a person or party. Secondly, Dryden belonged to that moral school of writers which holds that the aim of all comic art is to mend, to reform. "The time end of satires," says Dryden, "is the amendment of vices by correction". The

main intention of the satirist is to expose, to deride, to condemn and thus, to amend and reform. Dryden's attitude towards follies and defects is more ridulatory than contemptuous. His contempt is finely expressed in the characters of Achitophel, Zimri, and Shimei, full of humour and masterly wit. Humour and wit, which delight in the departures from the normal, in inconsistencies and incongruities of character and idea, are the means with which a satirist exposes the follies and weaknesses. Dryden has eminently used this device.

Did Dryden indulge in personal satire? The answer would be in the affirmative. But his attacks on the contemporary figures and his exposition and ridiculation of the literary and political enemies are radically different from those of pamphleteers and lampooners. Dryden has indulged in personal satire. In *The Medal* and *Mac Flecknoe* he has made personal attacks on Shadwell and Settle. But these invectives are witty and refined, not in the least vulgar. For example, we may look to the portrait of Shadwell:

*Shadwell alone my perfect image bears:  
Mature in dullness from his tender years;  
Shadwell, alone, of all my sons, is he  
Who stands confirmed in stupidity  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence  
But Shadwell never deviates into sense."*

Dryden followed the classical authors. Personal gibes were the staple of the Roman satires. Dryden, following the examples of classical authors, made personal attacks but the persons who are thus exposed and ridiculed exemplify public follies and general abuses. He held that particular persons, when they become public nuisance 'may properly by exposed by name for public examples of vices and follies'.

Dryden's conception of satire is akin to that of Aristophanes and Rabelais. The chief characteristics of Dryden's satirical vision have been summed by Nicol Smith: "His best work is inspired by the sanity that inhabits at the heart of things. He lived in a turbulent age, and he was a fighter. But all extremists are his natural enemies. His weapons can be used, on occasion, by either side. He hated wrong headed

theorists and fanatics, who commonly impose their alliance, a heavy burden, on the reforming party in the satire. He also hated all contented and self sufficient dullards, who for the most part have to be supported, a grievous weight, by the party that stands for the established order. He makes war on both, with laughter that flashes and cuts."

The last sentence sums up the chief characteristic of Dryden's satire. He has satirised mistaken theorists and over-zealous fanatics on the one hand and the all contented and self sufficient dullards on the other. He has attacked them bitterly but wittily.

**(b) Absalom and Achitophel : an allegorical satire—**

A satirist never makes the direct attack on his victim. That is the art of a phampleteer. The satirists attacks the follies and weaknesses and persons who exemplify them in an indirect manner. This was the method adopted by ancient-classical and contemporary French authors. Dryden, following them, adopted the same device. Allegory, Fable, classical imitation, mock heroic, parody and burlesque—these are the chief devices of a satirist. Dryden couched the theme of "*Absalom and Achitophel*" in form of an allegory. Allegory had become a common form of literary expression during the seventeenth and the the preceding centuries. The great novels, narrative poems were written in allegorical style. Dryden has justified the use of allegory, and has declared it the fittest medium for writing political satires by pointing out Barclay's "*Euphormio*" as an example of Varronian satire. Barclay has described his purpose in the following words:

"I will compile some stately fables, in manner of a history.....Then will I with the show of danger stir up pity, fear and horror : and by and by, clear up all doubts and graciously allay the tempests.....while they read, while they are affected with anger or favour, as it were against strangers, they shall meet with themselves; and find in the glass held before them, the show and merit of their own fame. It will perchance make them ashamed longer to play those parts upon the stage of this life, for which they must confess themselves justly taxed in a fable."

A vogue for this type of writing was accentuated in view of the fact that Charles II had brought a taste for this species of writing from his exile in France, where it had set a fashion during the controversial days. Dryden, it has been brought to notice by Ian Jack, looked into the allegorical literature of France in search of such hints as could help in him in the composition of lampoons and satires. The other satirists, pamphleteers and lampooners had followed the same suit.

*"Absalom and Achitophel"* veils its political satire under the transparent disguise of one of the most familiar episodes of old Testament history, which the existing crisis in English affairs resembled sufficiently to make the allegory apposite and its interpretation easy. The attention of the English public, and, more especially, that of the citizens of London with whom the decision of the immediate political issue lay, was sure to be arrested by a series of characters whose names and distinctive features were borrowed from the old testament, and the analogy between Charles II's and David's early exile and final triumphant establishment on the throne was a commonplace of Restoration poetry"—(Ward).

The analogy between Jewish history in the reign of David and the political condition of England in 1680 had given Dryden the inspiration to write his greatest political satire in allegorical form. Dryden was not the first to explore the literary capacity of this old Testament episode. Many before him had attempted this Biblical parallel in one way or the other. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer likened Monmouth to Absalom; in 1681, a satirist had dubbed Shaftesbury an Achitophel. Dryden has made full use of the episode. Prof. Richard F. Jones has shown that this Biblical parallel was in common use during the seventeenth century. This allegorical scheme had some obvious advantages that have been pointed out by Prof. E. S. De Beer: "Dryden could write more freely about Charles II and his victims could not take action against him without acknowledging the likeness of their portraits".

The most remarkable thing about *"Absalom and Achitophel"* is the interesting treatment of allegory to heighten the effects of political satire. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer had dealt



with the supposed intentions of Monmouth in the guise of Absalom in his tract "*Absalom's conspiracy*", and in the following year a satire had applied the name of Achitophel to Shaftesbury. For the rest, Dryden was not very careful about fitting the secondary figures of his poem exactly with their scriptural aliases. A critical evaluation of the allegorical treatment of Absalom and Achitophel story by Dryden has been made by Ian Jack in the following words: "Although a contemporary subject must have had many attractions for a poet who shared Milton's desire for subjects of unassailable truth, there were serious difficulties in the way of investing it with any degree of grandeur. As Davenant had pointed out in his discussion of the heroic poem, 'men' even of the best education, discover their eyes to be weak when they look upon the glory of virtue, which is great actions, and rather endure it at distance than near, being more apt to believe and love the renown of predecessors than of contemporaries, whose deeds, excelling theirs in their own sight, seem to up braid them, and are not revered as examples of virtue, but envied as the favours of fortune. Envy apart the familiarity of the subject matter was against the poet. As Verall remarked, such unavoidable words, as *Parliament Jury*, *write Committee*, defy an elevated idiom; they would have reduced, Dryden's poem to the mock-heroic level, precisely as Flecknoel Ogleby, and Shadwell reduce *Mac Flecknoe*. The old testament allegory helped Dryden to raise his poem to a dignified level without collapsing into bathos.

"The possibility of using an elevated style was not the only benefit conferred by the allegory. It also acted as the instrument of Dryden's brilliant wit, and helped to give the poems an air of objectivity more impressive than the direct exclamatoriness so common in political satire. Because it is misleadingly over simplified, the action stands in relief, and the fact that such figures as the King, the Tempter, and the Mob are so readily recognized, carries the action a step further from the realm of mere political wrangling in the direction of universal philosophical of poetic birth."

The most remarkable characteristic of *Absalom and Achitophel* is that Dryden depend its significance by finding

a Biblical parallel for the contemporary situation. When the reader feels that all this has happened before the present event assumes an increased importance. "Poesy", said Bacon, "is nothing else but feigned history." By basing his poem on true history, and applying actual events of the past to his own times, Dryden made his satire more forceful and effective. Had he invented a fiction of his own, he would not have achieved his purpose. A Biblical story had a special sort of prestige, because it was a generation that knew the Bible well and had special regards for the Old Testament as a sacred book and not merely a collection of Hebrew literature. It is on account of the contemporary religious attitude towards the Old Testament that the poem became very popular. "All through the satisfaction of following Dryden's ingenious application of ancient history to current events and characters: a satisfaction similar to that which the readers of Pope's imitations of Horace or Johnson's imitations of Juvenal obtained from their substitution of modern names for those of ancient Rome."

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### (c) **Absalom and Achitophel** : A Political Satire-

Dryden had found his great literary opportunity in undertaking the composition, whether or not at the request of the king, of "*Absalom and Achitophel*". He took advantage of opportunity in the spirit of neither hired bravos nor the spiteful lampooners of his time. For making full use of this opportunity, he had prepared himself when he wrote dramas. Dryden must have felt that he had got an opportunity of influencing public opinion by exposing the aims and methods of the party of revolution. This he proposed to accomplish neither by a poetic summary of the case nor by a versified sermon on the sins of treason and corruption, by "holding up to the times and their troubles, with no magisterial air or dictatorial gesture, a mirror in which, under a happily contrived disguise, the true friends and the real foes of their king and country should be recognized." This, as defined by Dryden himself, is the Varronian form of satire in which serious intention is mixed with pleasant manner. Lucian's *Dialogues* and Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae* and Spenser's "*Mother Hubbard's Tale*" belong to this species of satire. Dryden placed his *Absalom and Achitophel* in the same rank.

The political question, which forms the background of this great satire was that of succession of the Catholic heir to the throne or of his exclusion in favour of the Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of the king. For many months, Shaftesbury who had served and abandoned many governments, had joined the opposition and gave lead to the movement. Shaftesbury wanted to deprive the Duke of York of his right to succeed on the grounds of his being a Catholic. Two parliaments had been called and twice the Exclusion Bill, which aimed at depriving the Duke of York from succession, had been rejected. Then Shaftesbury was committed to the Tower on a charge of high treason. It was at this time of tension, that Dryden was asked to write a satire in order to work upon public opinion. The first part of *Absalom and*

*Achitophel* was published on Nov. 17, 1681. A week after the publication of this poem, the bill was ignored by the Grand Jury and Shaftesbury was freed. His followers stuck a medal to honour him. This gave Dryden the opportunity of writing his another satire *The Medal*, soon it was replied by "*The Meda' of John Bayes*" written by Shadwell. Then Dryden wrote his *Mac Flecknoe* to satirise Shadwell.

'*Absalom and Achitophel*' is complete in itself, though it was intended to help in producing a direct result at a given moment. It should not be regarded either as the first instalment of a larger whole or as an introduction to the second part that appeared after some time whose only a fragment was written by Dryden.

This great satire of Dryden is written in the allegorical form. No theme was more familiar for the purpose of satire than the utilization of Biblical personages and scenes. In "*Absalom's conspiracy*". Monmouth had been likened to Absalom, and in a tract that appeared a months before, Dryden started writing this poem, Shaftesbury was dubbed as an Achitophel. In this ready made frame, Dryden displays all the classical power of form.

"*Absalom and Achitophel*" remains the greatest political satire of English because it is frankly political and does not intend to convey a general impression of the follies and extravagances of a particular section. "With Dryden, every hit is calculated and every stroke gets home; in each character brought on the scene, those features only are selected for exposure or praise which are of direct significance for the purpose in hand. It is not a satirical narrative complete in itself which is attempted, the rest denouement of the piece falls not within, but out side, its compass; in other words, the poem was to the lead up, as to an unavoidable sequel, to the trial and conviction of its hero. The satirist, after the fashion of a great parliamentary orator, has his subject and his treatment of it well in hand; through all the force of the invective and the fervour of the praise, there runs the consciousness of the possibility that the political situation may change. This causes a constant self control and wariness in the author,

who is always alive to his inspiration and never unmindful of his cue. Instead of pouring forth a stream of Aristophanic vituperation or boyish fun in the vein of canning, he so nicely adapts the relations of the more important of his characters to the immediate issue that the treatment, both of the tempter Achitophel and of the tempted Absalom, admitted of manipulation when, before the appearance of the poem in a second edition, the condition of affairs had changed."—(A.W. Ward).

The story of Absalom and Achitophel, the tempter and the tempted, as narrated in the Old Testament, has obvious capacities for political adaptation. In the seventeenth century particularly in the period of political tension, the story had been used in more than one way. Like many other great writers, Dryden was wont to carry out Moliere's principle to the fullest, and to care very little for technical originality or plan or main idea. The allegorical form was suggested to him by prevailing literary tastes of the time. Character portraiture, or set description of a person, in prose or verse had become a fashion both in France and England. The prose portraits presented by Clarendon Saint Evremond are still unsurpassed. Dryden accordingly, wrote his Absalom and Achitophel" as a series of portraits. The connective links are very slender, in form of speeches and arguments. Dryden did not care for a regular architectural construction of plot though he was by this, time an accomplished craftsman because he had been writing plays for about twenty years. But this architectural defect was seldom observed by the contemporary readers because the subject was of so vital an interest that they little cared to be critical about the beginning, middle or end of the poem, or about other structural details. Sharp personal satire and downright political denunciation needed no such setting as this, a setting which to all appearance Dryden was as unable as he was unwilling to give. He gave greater importance to other things of the poem. He displayed his wonderful command over the heroic couplet in this poem. This command over the couplet had been first displayed by him in the early poems, and had been carefully exercised and developed in the plays. In his satires he used it perfectly.

The second characteristic of "Absalom and Achitophel" is the faculty of satire. The third is the specious argument

in verse which has been equalled by anyone except Lucretius. All these three qualities command over the couplet, display of the faculty of satire and specious argument in verse—are almost indifferently exemplified in '*Absalom and Achitophel*'.

"*Absalom and Achitophel*" is a political satire in a different way from *Hudibras*. Not only is the latter medieval and the former modern; but while religion predominates over politics in the latter, in the former politics predominates over religion. The difference is partly due to lapse of time. England was still interested in questions of sects, but the fervour religion was gone or going. Partly it is due to difference of plan. *Hudibras* rides for adventures, and whatever he meets is the subject of the book. Dryden's poem has for its theme a definite political project, the plot to bar the succession of James and put in his place the Duke of Monmouth. Consequently the sects, which were Butler's main theme, fall into the background. But though no longer first they are still important. The Popish plot is a threat in the fabric, and to that we owe the terrible portrait of Oates under the name of Corah. The 'dreaming saints' are struck at, who employ their power "nothing to build, and all things to destroy". The doctrine of election provokes the jeer :

*Born to be saved, even in their own despite,  
Because they cannot help believing right.*

The multiplicity of sects is ridiculed in a characteristic couplet:

*Gods they had tried of every shape and size  
That god smiths could produce, or priests devise.*

The scornful mention of priests is, as Johnson has noted, characteristic of Dryden" (Hugh Walker : *English Satire and Satirists*)

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## Dryden and the Main Characters in Absalom and Achitophel.

According to Nicol Smith, "*Absalom and Achitophel* is one of the great national portrait galleries in English poetry, the richest that we have since Chaucer wrote his Prologue". Character portrait, in verse or prose, had become a fashion in the seventeenth century and was common both in England and France. Clarendon Evremond are famous for the presentation of prose portraits which have never been surpassed. Dryden too, according to the prevailing fashion of the time, made his poem little more than a string of such portraits, connected together by a very slender thread. His main object in writing "*Absalom and Achitophel*" was not merely to attack the persons who plotted against the king, but to hold to the times a mirror in which, under the transparent disguise of a Biblical story, the true foes and real friends of the king and country should be recognized. While portraying the characters of the poem, Dryden had to take into consideration several factors, the chief being man's merit or guilt, author's personal relations with the degree of royal favour enjoyed by him. Satirist, when he is writing with a view to produce a desired political effect, has to take sides. Consequently Dryden had to praise loftily the persons belonging to the Royal group and had to condemn those belonging to the party of revolution. He has extended every praise and eulogy to Absalom (Monmouth) :

- Early in foreign fields he won renown  
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown :  
• In peace the thoughts of war he could remove  
And seemed as he were only born for Love."*

Absalom is a good person, rather a young Messiah of the people. These benevolent qualities of Absalom have been meticulously described by Dryden.

*From east to west his glories he displays:  
And like the sun, the Promised land surveys.*

*Fame runs before him as the morning star  
And shouts of joy salute him from afar.  
Each house receives him as a guardian God,  
And consecrates the place of his abode.*

Dryden, who, by this time, was an experienced man of the world as well as an accomplished man of letters, has described the ambition of Achitophel in a very deft way. "He owns his ambition, but vanity whispers that it leans to virtue's side—"desire of greatness is a god like sin." Achitophel, the tempter feeds the flame, declaring that it is such qualities that become a throne :

*Not that your father's mildness I condemn  
But manly force becomes the diadem.*

Here Dryden has to face one of the greatest difficulties inherent in his theme. Achitophel must criticise the king; but royal ears are rarely willing to hear criticism, and probably the royal memory might retain the fact that the words had been written by Dryden, though they were put into the mouth of Achitophel. The peril is evaded with masterly skill. The criticism of Charles is made into an imputation of virtues. He is mild, he is lavishly generous to his subjects. It is true he is changed with real vices as well; but they are vices he was proud of, not vices he was ashamed of. He thought the better of himself for his amours, and his courtiers thought the better of him too. Thus lightly did Dryden skim over the dangerous ice; thus skilfully did he frame criticism so as to be more welcome to the subject of it than panegyric. The man of the world is shown too in the whole series of portraits. Something more goes to the making of those portraits than mastery of style; something more even than long study of character for the purposes of the drama. These were indispensable; but indispensable likewise was the familiar knowledge which came from mingling for many years with the very men he drew, their friends, their equals in station, men who looked at life from the same angle and cherished the same ambitions. Only so could the perfect fitness of the phrase to the character have been surpassed."

—(Hugh Walker).



Dryden has not been critical to the minor characters of the Royal party, like Barzillai, Adriel, Amiel, and others. Instead, he is evidently considerate to them. These minor characters are not so immortal as are the hostile characters. Ian Jack has observed: "Although they lack the tremendous power which has immortalised the hostile characters, these little portraits are skilfully done."

Dryden's artistic faculties and crafts-man-ship in the portrayal of characters are displayed in the delineation of characters of the opposite group. Achitophel, the Biblical substitute for Shaftesbury, and the arch-enemy of the public peace has been drawn with a masterly skill. Achitophel is

*A name to all succeeding ages curst :  
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,  
Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit  
Restless, unfixed in principles and place  
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace ;  
A fiery soul, which working out of its way,  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay  
And over informed the tenement of clay.*

Shaftesbury, the leader of the hostile band, is dubbed as "Hell's dire agent." Achitophel the tempter causes the downfall of Absalom, just as an agent of Hell or Satan tempts the virtuous man and leads him to fall. The Biblical parallelism has helped Dryden to bring out, more forcefully, the satanic plot and devilish character of Shaftesbury.

Zimri represents the Duke of Buckingham. He is portrayed in a different manner. Achitophel is more an individual and less a type, but Zimri is more a type and less an individual. According to Ian Jack, the portrait of Zimri is essentially a humorous character of the inconstant man :

*A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome :  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
Was everything by starts and nothing long ;  
But in the course of one revolving moon  
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon.  
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking  
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.*

According to Dryden the most famous character of *Absalom* and *Achitophel* is Zimri, whom he considered worth the whole poem. "The character of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem : it is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough; and he, for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed, I might have suffered justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides, and little extravagancies : To which, the writer a man is he is generally the more abnoxious. It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic." But Bonamy Dobree does not accede to Dryden's view. In his opinion Achitophel is the most important character of the poem.

Dr. Ian Jack has expressed his views about the minor characters of the hostile group in the following words: "Serious scorn distinguished the characters of Shemei and Corah from that of Zimri while in indirectness of approach involving some degree of humour makes them off even more clearly from the unsmiling arraignment of Achitophel. It is not because they are censured any less decidedly, but because commoners can not be as dangerous to the nation as a noble man, that there is a contemptuous humour in the lines devoted to slings by Bethel and Titus Oates which is completely absent from the description of Shaftesbury. The character of Shemei begins with explicit and emphatic opprobrium :

*"But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,  
The wretch, who heavens annointed dared to curse"*

The effect of irony which informs the whole portrait, however, modulates from pure scorn to scornful ridicule :

*Shemei, whose youth did early promise bring  
Of zeal to God, and hatred to his king ;  
Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,  
And never broke the sabbath but for Gain  
Chaste were his cellers, and his shrievel board  
The grossness of a city Feast abhorred :*

*His cooks with long disuse, their trade forgot;  
Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.*

The portrait of Corah, that 'monumental brass' is a similar compound of direct, name-calling and devastating irony :

*Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud  
Sure signs he neither cholerick nor proud.*

It is noteworthy that such irony as may be found in the hostile characters of the poem is practically always directed at religious non conformists, whether catholic's or sectarians."

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### **"Absalom and Achitophel" : Versification**

One can appreciate Dryden's versification, particularly in his satires and didactic poems, only when one makes oneself familiar with the versification of Dryden's immediate predecessors. The versification of English satire before Dryden had been almost without exception harsh and rugged. The passages of Marston, Donne and Hall can hardly be called verse. The same can be said of Marvell and Oldham. The octosyllabic satire of Cleveland, Butler and others, though less uncouth, was purposely grotesque. It is said by some critics that heroic satirists were intentionally rugged. The early satirists of the seventeenth century adopted the jaw-breaking style on account of some mistaken classical tradition. Secondly, they did not have perfect command of the couplet. Thirdly, the languid cadence was almost unsuited for satires. Their couplet was almost prosaic. But Dryden was in no such case. "His native gifts and his enormous practice in play writing had made the couplet as natural a vehicle to him for any form of discourse as blank verse or as plain prose. The form of it too which he had most affected, was specially suited for satire. In the first place, this form had.....a remarkably varied cadence; in the second, its strong anti-thesis and smart telling lets lent themselves to personal description and attack with consummate ease. There are passages of Dryden's

satires in which every couplet has not only the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The rapidity of movement from one couplet to the other is another remarkable characteristic. Even Pope, master as he was of verse, often fell into the fault of isolating his couplets too much, as if he expected applause between each, and wished to give time for it. Dryden's verse on the other hand strides along with a careless olympian motion, as if the writer were looking at his victims rather with a kind of good, humoured scorn than any elaborate triumph."

Congreve once said about Dryden that he was an improving writer to the last. Dryden steadily improved the texture of his verse. The difference can be seen in the texture of his verse between his early poems and *Absalom and Achitophel* or *The Hind and the Panther*. It appears rather miraculous to know that the author of the poem on the death of Hastings afterward wrote master satires and didactic poems. Dryden's metrical evolution began with the earliest verses and proceeded through the plays, through the poems on public affairs and through the translations Dryden had a conviction that a poet's best powers should go into the perfecting of his verse instrument. He had a strong conviction that versification and numbers are the greatest pleasures of poetry and always tended to cherish heroic verse as a musical instrument, and to work for harmony and rhythm alone. He always aimed at writing 'even, sweet and flowing' lines. Dryden describes:

*A fiery soul, which working out its way  
Fretted the pigmy body of decay  
And over informed the tenement of clay.*

Dryden exhibits the best of his skill in the versification of *Absalom and Achitophel*. Hither to English satire had been purposely rough, as if ruder the weapon the uglier would be the wound. Even Dryden felt that satire, to be effective, does not require a command of versification:

*But satire needs not these, and wit will shine  
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.*

But long-period of play writing had made him the acclaimed master of verse. when he turned to satirical writing he

such a mastery of couplet that he could not write his satires in rhyme. Let those write rough verses who cannot write better; but those who can write well should employ their faculty to make the satire more effective. A satire should not entertain either rough manners or careless speech. In the Varronian style, even the ugly things should be communicated in a graceful manner. Hence forward satire was not to revert to its cruder habits, displayed by Dryden's predecessors. Dryden set a standard for his successors and eighteenth century satirists. English satire was raised to the rank of an art by Dryden.

Dryden was fond of latinistic polysyllables. This fondness for polysyllables developed from his capacity which they seemed to have for softening uncouth numbers, for supplying the heroic line, and for imparting to it an undulating grace. We may well quote the following lines on Corah.

*Yet, Corah, thou shalt from oblivion pass;  
Erect they self, thou monumental brass,  
High as the serpent of thy metal made,  
While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.*

These lines have an intrinsic majesty of movement. The lines has something of the Miltonic grandeur in them, which is a device adopted by Dryden to impart some epic qualities and grandeur to his poem. "Absalom and Achitophel" is full Miltonic inversions.

Him staggering so when Hell's dire agent found reminds one of those lines of *Paradise Lost* describing the steepy fall of the Archfiend into the vale of sulphurous vapours. It is for such Miltonic inversions found in Dryden's poem that Mark van Doren paid the following tribute to Dryden: "Dryden was peculiarly fitted to lead the rhetorical grand march in English poetry..... He was inclined to fall into an exalted antithetical tone of formal address. This tone was of enormous advantage in *Absalom* where it erected great public personages to their proper height and gave to satire a strange epic importance."

Dryden said, 'the chief secret is the choice of words; and, by this choice, I do not here mean elegance of expression,

but propriety of sound, to be varied according to the nature of the subject." The following true utterly contemptuous lines from *Absalom and Achitophel* :

*A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed,  
Of the true old enthusiastic breed.*

are perfectly turned; every vowel and consonant, as it were steeped in disdain, is expressive of the contempt. Wordsworth said that Dryden had a certain ardour and impetuosity of mind and an excellent ear. No reader or critic can deny the incomparable brilliancy of its diction and versification.

**Handling of the Heroic Couplet:**—Dryden had attained mastery over the heroic couplet even in his early poems. After reading '*Astraea Redux*' and other poems the reader is a little surprised to see Dryden abandoning heroic couplet for rhymed verses or blank verse for some time. The very first lines of *Astraea Redux* show his mastery over the heroic couplet clearly enough.

*Now with a general piece the world was blest  
While ours a world divided from the rest,  
A dreadful quiet felt, and worser far  
Than arms, a Sullen interval of war.*

"Here is already the energy divine for which the author was to be famed, and, in the last line at least, an instance of the varied cadence and subtly disposed music which were, in his hands, to free the couplet from all charges of monotony and tameness." (Saintsbury).

The story of Dryden's conquest of English poetry is the story not of his material but of his manner. It is the story of a poet who inherited a medium, perfected it and handed it on to succeeding generation. That medium was the heroic couplet verse. Prof. Mark Van Doren observes : "the utility of the heroic couplet had been established for all time in England by Chaucer. Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare had made various uses of it at the end of the sixteenth century, as had also the group of satirists which included Hall, Lodge, Marston and Donne. It had grown more and more in favour during the early years of Dryden's century, and had begun to adapt itself

to the type of mind which Dryden represents long before he came of age poetically. This adaptation involved a number of characteristics, of which the end-stop, the known, was only one; the others were a conformation of the sentence structure to the metrical pattern, a tendency towards poly-syllables within the line, a tendency towards emphatic words at the ends of lines, and a frequent use of balance with pronounced caesura. The end-stop, and the modification of sentence-structure to suit the length of measure, made for pointedness if not for brevity, and provided in the couplet a ratiocinative unit which served admirably as the basis for declarative or argumentative poems. The poly-syllables made for speed and flexibility, and encouraged a Latinized, abstract vocabulary. The insistence upon important words for the closing of lines meant that the sense was not likely to trail off or be left hanging; and the use of balance promoted that air of spruce finality with which every reader of Augustan verse has long been familiar."

**Use of Metre:**—Congreve once remarked that Dryden was an improving writer to the last. The remark was definitely at the gradual improvement of style from his early verses to the satirical and didactic poems that attained perfection. Dryden constantly improved the texture of his verse, so that there is a vast difference between the texture of his early verse and that of the poems of maturity. Dryden's metrical evolution commenced with his earliest verses and proceeded through the plays, through satires and didactic poems and through the translations.

Dryden was influenced, so far as metrical cultivation is concerned by classical and French authors, particularly by Rapin, Boileau, Longinus and St. Evremond. His best style that is, the style of "*Absalom and Achitophel*" and other satires and didactic poems owed a good deal to France. He was indebted to French criticism and ideals of style rather than to French poetry. These authors produced in him a conviction that adequacy of expression is the first and last rule of writing and it had a great influence upon satires and other ratiocinative poems.

Pope appreciated Dryden's skill in versification in the following lines :

*Waller was smooth; but Dryden taught to join  
The varying verse the full resounding line,  
The long majestic march, and energy divine.*

Some improvements had been already made in English numbers; but the full force of English language was not yet felt. Even the smooth verses were commonly feeble. It was by sheer accident that Cowley occasionally could write good line. Dryden knew how to choose smooth and sonorous words to vary the pauses and adjust the accents, to diversify the cadence, and yet preserve the smoothness of his metre."

—(Johnson).

Dryden established the use of triplets and Alexandrines, which are not universally approved. Swift always censured them. The rhymes of Dryden are commonly just, Alexander Pope said about Dryden : "He could select from them better specimens of every mode of poetry than any other English writer could supply." Really Dryden was able to choose the best specimens of every branch of literature, not only from his own native literature but also from the literature, both ancient and modern, of all countries. Samuel has spoken very highly of Dryden's versification : "Perhaps no nation ever produced a writer that enriched his language with such variety of models. To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion, of our metre, the refinement of our language and much of the correctness of our sentiments. By him we were taught '*Sapere et fari*', to think naturally and express forcibly. Though Davies has reasoned in rhyme before him, it may be perhaps maintained that he was the first who joined argument with poetry. He showed us the true bounds of a translator's liberty. What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus, may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden."

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## Questions and Answers

**Q. 1. What is meant by the term "SATIRE"? What are the chief qualities of Dryden's satire?**

**Ans.** The word *satire* has been derived from Latin *Satira* which means a poem aimed at prevalent vices or follies. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as a poem or, in modern use sometimes, a prose composition in which vices or follies are held up to ridicule," the term is sometimes also used: though less correctly, to describe a composition in verse or prose intended to ridicule a person or class of persons, by exposing their follies and vices. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, describing the nature of satire, quotes from a preface written by Holyday in 1673: "According to the ancient use and law of satire, it should be nearer the comedy than the tragedy, not disclaiming against vice, but jeering at it." Romans were apparently the first great satirists. Persius, Horace, and Juvenal, who wrote verse satires, laid the broad lines of satire as a literary form. Greek poets like Aristophanes did enter some satiric elements in their writings; but they were primarily comedians, not satirists. Dryden pointed out that Roman satire was an independent manufacture, not a literary borrowing from Greek literature. *The Dictionary* has also quoted Goldwin Smith who distinguished three kinds of satire, in his article in the *Atlantic Monthly*: "the epicurean which laughs at mankind.....the stoical which indignantly lashes mankind.....the cynical which hates and despises mankind." At the risk of making too facile a generalization one may mention that Horace is the writer of Epicurean satires; Persius, of stoical satires; Juvenal, of cynical satires.

The aim of all satirists, from Archilochus the Greek to Mr. Humbert Wolfe of our own day, is the artistic expression of either good humoured amusement or out right indignation at prevalent follies and vices. The satirist feels driven to draw the attention of the reader to any departure from what he believes to be the truth, or honesty or justice. He aims at restoring the balance, correcting or punishing the

wrong-doer. Satire is a spontaneous overflow of powerful indignation at foible and vices.

(For a detailed information about the nature and aims of satire, read *The Nature of satire*, page 39 : and for about the qualities of Dryden's satire, read *Satires of John Dryden*, page 57.)

**Q. 2. Write a short essay on Dryden's satiric method.**

**Or**

**Describe and illustrate Dryden's distinctive qualities as a satirist.**

**Ans.** Dryden had interested himself in satire as a literary form even before he actually wrote *Absalom and Achitophel* and other satires while at Westminster he had translated some satires of Persius; he had incorporated into his plays several passages of incidental satire. He was quite familiar with the Roman tradition of satire as incorporated in the works of Horace, Persius and Juvenal, and with the English traditions of satire as may be inferred from works of Langland, Gascoign, Donne, Lodge, Hall, Marston, Cleveland, Marvell, Oldham and Samuel Butler. He had, above all, become familiar with the satirical spirit of his own time, punctuated as it was with sophisticated vices, and political and religious controversies. The days he lived in proved unexpectedly rich soil for the growth of satire as literary form.

Dryden's satiric method is different from that of Roman Satirists, as well as from that of his predecessors and Contemporaries. There had been a continuous tradition among satirists that they must affect immense moral indignation at the vices, follies, foibles and evils they attacked. Roman satirists, especially Juvenal and Persius are responsible for the growth of this tradition. Even Dryden's example did not put an end to it, it is followed by his contemporaries and successors, such as Churchill and Lloyd. Now this moral indignation, apt to be tiresome when the subject is purely ethical, becomes quite intolerable when the subject is purely political. A political satirist is not expected to have the same sort of indignation at his opponent, as a moral satirist does have at follies and vices. It never does for a political satirist to lose his

temper and to rave and rant and denounce with the air of an inspired prophet. Dryden has observed this rule. His manner towards his subjects is that of a cool and not ill humoured scorn. "They (subjects of satire) are great scoundrels certainly, but they are probably even more contemptible than they are vicious. The well-known line.

They got a villain and we lost a fool, expresses his attitude admirably, and the attitude in its turn explains the frantic rage which Dryden's satire produced in his opponents."

—(*George Saintsbury*)

The second differentiating quality of Dryden's satiric method is that the characters are neither types nor marked individuals. Most satirists are usually prone to the error of attacking either mere types or marked individuals. The first is the fault of Regnier and other French satirists; the second is the fault of Pope. The first case satire becomes vague, because it is sort of general declamation against the prevalent vices and follies. In the second case, suspicion of personal pique comes in. Dryden is not a victim of either fault. His figures are always types and individuals. Zimri is Buckingham on the one hand, and the idle grand Seigneur who plays at politics and at learning on the other hand; Achitophel is Shaftesbury as well as a political intriguer, Shimei is Bethal as well as a sectarian politician of all days. Dryden exercised a singular judgment in selecting the traits in order to draw these satirical portraits.

(Also see Dryden as a Satirist and Theory of Satire on pages 72 and 60 respectively)

**Q. 3. Describe and illustrate Dryden's distinctive qualities as a satirist.**

**Illustrate from *Absalom and Achitophel* the leading characteristics of Dryden's satires ?**

**Ans.** The first thing that strikes one in Dryden's satires, especially in *Absalom and Achitophel* is their concentrated and convincing poetic style. Satires had generally distinguished themselves till Dryden's time by their harshness in verse expression. Hugh Walker has pointed out that neither Persius, nor Horace

nor even Juvenal gives to his hexametres the polish and stately grace of the *Aeneid*. The predecessors of Dryden in England had made, of course, a virtue of harshness in expression. Dryden's satiric verse is clear and concentrated in expression, and majestic in impulsion. Pope's well-known lines are quite appropriate.

*Walker was smooth; but dryden taught to join  
The varying verse; the full resounding line,  
The long majestic march and energy divine.*

Swinburne has remarked that Dryden gave a majestic garb to the satiric muse. One has the feeling that it is Dryden's style that transforms the deformed, elevates the trivial, in his satirical compositions.

The second thing that strikes us in Dryden's satires is his capacity to ennoble and exalt his subject, even when he is apparently. Condemning and demeaning it. He was a partisan and his business was to ridicule Shaftesbury, Bethel, Buckingham, Oates. But Dryden was also a poet and as a poet he had to create men and situations that should be vested with immortality. In his satires Dryden the poet is stronger and more dominating than Dryden the partisan. In the words of Bonamee Dobree, "We have only to think of MacFlecknoe to forget Shadwell; to think of Achitophel is to forget Shaftesbury, the persons are lost in history, the satires are part of our national consciousness. Every thing is all the time compared not with some thing little, with something great."

In *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden excels in description, in argumentation and in portraiture. The opening pages constitute a masterly analysis of the contemporary political situation. C. S. Lewis pays the following tribute: "of this transforming power I know no better example than the resume of the political situation which opens *Absalom and Achitophel*, not only is the prosaic made poetical, but the obscure and complicated is made clear and simple. A child can hardly fail to understand the state of Israel as Dryden describes it; and yet surprisingly little of that situation, as Dryden saw it has been omitted." The Biblical allegory, instead of hindering, helps the reader to understand the poem.

(See *Absalom and Achitophel* as a satire, page, 114, 118)

**Q. 4. The poem (*Absalom and Achitophel*) really consists of a series of satirical portraits." Discuss.**

**OR**

**"*Absalom and Achitophel* is one of the great national portrait galleries in English Literature". Discuss.**

One of the peculiarities of Dryden's satirical works is that they stand almost alone among the satirical works of the world both classical and English. Satirists before him had been attacking either individuals or types-individuals who were definitely marked as individuals. Regnier and other minor French satirists attack on mere types. Consequently the point and zest of the thing are lost, and the satire becomes a general declamation against vice and folly in abstract. Pope always attacks upon marked individuals and such satires are looked as the personal invective on some other person. Dryden can never be accused of either of faults. His figures are always at once types and individuals. Zimri is Buckingham, no doubt; he is also the idle grand seigneur who plays at politics and at learning; Achitophel is Shaftesbury as well as an intriguer; Shemei is Bethel, but he is also a sectarian politician.

The portraits in *Absalom and Achitophel* are deservedly and universally praised. Hugh Walker refers to its superb gallery of portraits. Sir Edmund Gosse thinks that the poem "really consists of a series of satirical portraits cut and polished like jewels, and flashing malignant light from all their facets. But the portraits, like the speeches, formed merely a part of Dryden's general design to satirise the Whig attempt to bolster up Monmouth's claims to succeed his natural father. Dryden personally could have had little against the many persons he satirized in his poems neither against Absalom nor against Achitophel, neither against Shemei nor against Corah he satirized them because it was essential for the general scheme.

According to Nicol Smith *Absalom and Achitophel* is "One of the great national portrait galleries in English poetry, the richest that we have had since Chaucer wrote his Prologue." The main object of the poet was not merely to attack the king's enemies, but to present the whole constitutional position of the then England before the reader. Several

considerations have weighed in his portrayal of character, the most important being the merit or guilt of man, Poets personal relations with him and the royal favour he enjoyed. Naturally men belonging to the Royal Party have been praised and eulogised while those belonging to the enemy group have been condemned and criticised. Thus Absalom is drawn in picturesque terms :

*Early in foreign fields he won renown  
With Kings and States allied to Israels Crown;  
In peace the thoughts of war he could remove  
And seemed as he were only born for love*

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*From East to West his glories he displays  
And like the Sun, the Promised land surveys.  
Fame runs before him as the Morning Star  
And shouts of joy salute him from afar.  
Each house receives him as a Guardian God,  
And Consecrates the place of his abode.*

Absalom (Monmouth) has received the utmost praise and Eulogy from Dryden. The minor characters of the Royal group like Barzillai, Adriel, Amiel and others have also received considerable praise. They are skilfully drawn though they lack the tremendous power which has immortalised the hostile characters.

Dryden has displayed the most developed artistic skill and craftsman in the delineation of the hostile band of characters, led by the Archenemy of public peace, Achitophel (Shaftesbury). He is

*"A name to all succeeding ages curst  
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,  
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit  
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,  
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;  
A fiery soul, which working out of its way,  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay.  
And O'er informed the tenement of clay."*

Shaftesbury is dubbed as "Hells dire agent". Achitophel's succumbing to temptation has been compared to the Fall of man in the Biblical story. Thus Dryden condemned Shaftesbury the worst.

Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham) is portrayed in a quite different manner. Achitophel (Shaftesbury) is first an individual, then a type, Zimri is first a type then an individual. Dr. Ian Jack has remarked that it is, first of all, a humorous character of the Inconstant Man :

*"A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome:  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
Was every thing by starts and nothing long;  
But in the course of one revolving moon  
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon.  
Then all for women, painting, rhyming drinking  
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking."*

So far as other characters in the hostile group are concerned Dr. Ian Jack observes:

"Serious scorn distinguishes the characters of Shimei and Corah from that of Zimri, while in indirectness of approach involving some degree of humour marks them off even more clearly from the unsmiling arraignment of Achitophel. It is not because they are censured any less decidedly, but because commoners can not be as dangerous to the nation as a nobleman, that there is a contemptuous humour in the lines devoted to slings by Bethel and Titus Oates which is completely absent from the description of Shaftesbury. The character of Shimei begins with explicit and emphatic opprobrium:

- *But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,  
The wretch, who Heavens Anointed dared to curse.*

the effect of irony which informs the whole portrait, however, modulates from pure scorn to scornful ridicule

*Shemei, whose youth did early promise bring  
Of zeal to God, and hatred to his king;  
Did wisely from Expensive sins refrain,*

*And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain.....  
 Chaste were his cellers; and his shrieval board  
 The grossness of a city feast abhorred;  
 His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot;  
 Cool was his kitchen, though his Brains were hot.*

The portrait of Corah, that 'monumental brass' is a similar compound of direct name calling and devastating irony.

*"Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,  
 Sure signs he neither choleric, was nor proud."*

It is not worthy that such irony as may be found in the hostile characters of the poem is practically always directed at religious non-conformists, whether Catholics or Sectarians.<sup>6</sup>

Zimri is the most famous character. Dryden wrote in the *Discourse of Satire*: "The characters of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem: it is not bloody; but it is ridiculous enough; and he, for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly, but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously."

**Q. 5 Discuss Absalom and Achitophel as a great political satire.**

**Ans.** Of Dryden's four great satires, three - the two parts of *Absalom and Achitophel* and *The Medal* - were directly inspired by contemporary political conditions. *MacFlecknoe*, though a personal satire in which Dryden attacked his literary enemy Shadwell gained pungency on account of Shadwell's associations with the Whig party. Therefore, it would be convenient to characterize all the four great satires as political satires.

*Absalom and Achitophel* is the most popular political satire of John Dryden. It remains the greatest political satire in English literature, partly because it is frankly political, and partly because it was written with a view to condemn and disarm the political opponents of Charles II. A. W. Ward observes in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* Vol. VIII. ".....the poem was to lead up, as an unavoidable *Sequitur*, to



the trial and conviction of its hero (Shaftesbury). The satirist, after the fashion of a great parliamentary orator, has the subject and his treatment of it well in hand; through all the force of the invective and the fervour of the praise, there runs a consciousness of the possibility that the political situation may change. This causes a constant self control and wariness in the author, who is always alive to his inspiration and never unmindful of his cue. Instead of pouring forth a stream of Aristophanic vituperation or boyish fun in the vein of canning, he so nicely adapts the relations of the more important of his characters to the immediate issue that the treatment, both of the tempter, Achitophel and of the tempted Absalom, admitted of manipulation when, before the appearance of the poem in a second edition, the condition of affairs had changed."

(Also read *Absalom and Achitophel*. A political satire in the Introduction).

**Q. 6. Write a critical note on the plan of *Absalom and Achitophel* and on the execution of that plan.**

**Ans.** The story of the disastrous quarrel between David, king of Israel, and Absalom, his son, is narrated in *Samuel II* of the *Old Testament*. Under the transparent disguise of this story, Dryden has described the political and human issue between Charles II and his natural son, the Duke of Monmouth. Comparison, though vague and not very appropriate, is striking because the two stories are similar enough on the surface to justify the allegory and the title of the poem. After Saul's death, Charles II was restored to the throne of England. It is given in the *Old Testament* that Absalom killed his brother Amon to avenge the dishonour of his sister; similarly, the Duke of Monmouth took revenge on Sir John Coventry.

*And Amon's murder by a specious name  
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.*

Absalom, after his return to Israel from a temporary exile, won the hearts of his people; the Duke of Monmouth too became very popular in England :

*His looks, his gestures, and the words he frames  
And with familiar ease repeats their names.  
And thus formed by nature, furnished out with arts,  
He glides unfelt into their secret hearts.*

In the Biblical story, Absalom launches a revolt against his own father. He seeks support of Hushai who declines to help him because he is loyal to his father. But Achitophel, who had once been David's counsellor, advises and actively helps Absalom. In Dryden's poem, Hushai (the Earl of Rochester) is shown as being faithful to the king; while Achitophel (Shaftesbury) is painted as the real villain of piece. Achitophel's cunning speeches have their counterpart in the Biblical story.

"Moreover, Achitophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid : and all the people that are with him shall free; and I will smile the king only : and I will bring back all the people into thee : the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned : so all the people shall be in peace. And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel."

But, in Dryden's poem, there are certain departures and deviations from the Biblical narrative, but they are chiefly in the tone of the narrative. He has avoided violent reference to the king, even by proxy; Dryden's Absalom is treated with delicacy and tenderness Barzillai, in the Biblical story is "a very aged man, even fourscore years old." Dryden describes him as being "crowned with honour and with years." Achitophel and Shemei are not spared by Dryden; In Dryden's poem they are greater forces of evil than in the Biblical narrative.

Dryden's main aim was to condemn Shaftesbury and arouse public opinion against him when he was being tried on the charges of high treason against the state. Dryden wanted to impart a force and an appeal of conviction to his poem. In order to do this he chose the Biblical theme. An

he was successful in the execution of his plan. Prof. A. W. Ward observes : "*Absalom and Achitophel* veils its political satire under the transparent disguise of one of the most familiar episodes of *Old Testament* history, which the existing crisis in English affairs resembled sufficiently to make the allegory apposite and its interpretation easy. The attention of the English public, and, more especially, that of the citizens of London, with whom the decision of the immediate political issue lay, was sure to be arrested by a series of characters whose names and distinctive features were borrowed from the *Old Testament*; and the analogy between Charles II's and David's early exile and final triumphant establishment on the throne was a commonplace of restoration poetry."

**Q. 7. Show that *Absalom and Achitophel* is a characteristic product of the Restoration Age.**

**Ans.** If satirical writings are the chief literary product of the Restoration Age, Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* is not only the most famous but also the most representative satire of this period. The various elements and forces in social, political and moral spheres, encourage the growth of the satirical spirit on the one hand and of the satirical spirit on the one hand and of the satirical poems and portraits on the other. The political strife is responsible for the violence of the tone. The years between 1642 to 1660 and then from 1660 to 1688 are characterised with social and political instability. Dryden's masterpiece of satire reflects the the very political instability of the age. It portrays, in its acute form, the controversies, disputes and enmities of political world.

Dryden underlook the composition of this great satire at the request of Charles II. He found a great opportunity which he used neither like the hired bravos nor like the spiteful lampooners of his age. He had unconsciously prepared himself (in his career as a dramatist) for drawing satirical portraits and his spirit responded to time and circumstance. He found an opportunity of decisively influencing public opinion by exposing the aims and methods of the revolutionary party. "This he proposed to accomplish, not by a poetic summary of the rights of the case, or by a sermon in verse on the sins of

factionousness, corruption and treason, but by holding up to the times and their troubles, with no magisterial air or dictatorial gesture, a mirror in which, under a happily contrived disguise, the true friends and the real foes of their king and country should be recognized. "This poem is a characteristic product of the age because it depicts the most turbulent event of the age and brings out the personalities almost all national figures of the time, including the king. It is more characteristic of the Restoration Age than Pope's *Rape of the Lock* is of the eighteenth century.

*Absalom and Achitophel* is the characteristic product of the age from the literary point of view as well. The literature of the time was simultaneously and almost equally influenced and inspired by the contemporary French and ancient classical models. The influence of Persius, Horace and Juvenal is easily perceptible. Besides, Boileau's influence can not be underestimated. The clarity of expression is the chief quality and Dryden is most successful in balancing thought and expression in this poem.

( See chapter Restoration Satire and Satirists, page 47 ).

**Q. 8. Illustrate from *Absalom and Achitophel* Dryden's handling of the heroic couplet.**

**Ans.** Chaucer, by writing his *Canterbury Tales* in the heroic couplet, had established its utility in England once for all. Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare used it, according to their own convenience and skill, for various purposes, at the end of the Sixteenth century. Dryden's predecessors in Satire, Hall, Lodge, Marston and Donne also experimented it, some of them displayed their skill in it. It continued to be a favourite metre for the poets of the Restoration age till in Dryden's hands it became the only suitable metre for poetic expression. "This adaptation involved a number of characteristics, of which the end—stop, the best known, was only one; the others were a conformation of the sentence structure to the metrical pattern, a tendency towards poly-syllables within the line, a tendency towards emphatic words at the end of lines, and a frequent use of balance with pronounced caesura. The end—stop and the modification of sentence structure to suit the length of measure, made for pointedness if not for brevity, and provided

in the couplet a ratiocinative unit which served admirably as the basis for declarative or argumentative poems. The poly-syllables made for speed and flexibility, and encouraged a Latinized, abstract vocabulary. The insistence upon important words for the closing of lines meant that the sense was not likely to trail off or be left hanging; and the use of balance promoted that air of spruce finality with which every reader of Augustan verse has long been familiar."

—(Mark Van Doren).

Before Dryden, the versification of English satire had been harsh and rugged. One can easily quote from Marston, Donne and Hall to show how rugged the couplet was before it was taken and perfected by Dryden. For him couplet had become as natural a vehicle as blank verse or plain prose partly due to his native gifts and partly due to enormous practice in play writing. The form that he adopted and liked, was specially suited for satire. It had a remarkably varied cadence and its strong anti-thesis and smart telling hits lent themselves to personal description and attack with consummate ease. "There are passages of Dryden's satires in which every couplet has not on'y the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The *Rapidity* of movement from one couplet to the other is another remarkable characteristic. Even Pope, master as he was of verse, often fell into the fault of isolating his couplets too much, as if he expected applause between each and wished to give time for it. Dryden's verse on the other hand strides along with a careless olympian motion, as if the writer were looking at his victims rather with a kind of good humoured scorn than with any elaborate triumph."

—(Saintsbury)

**Q. 9.** This poem (*Absalom and Achitophel*) is the triumph of genius as distinguished from mere talent. Discuss.

**Ans.** *Absalom and Achitophel* is the supreme achievement of Dryden in the field of satire and one of the monuments of the Restoration literature. Dryden started writing this poem after a long period of play writing. In composing the speeches of Absalom, Achitophel and David, he had not completely departed from the position of a dramatist, who

puts arguments in the mouths of his characters. The dramatist does not personally involve himself in the issues of the debate. The main difference between Dryden the dramatist and Dryden the satirist is that in *Absalom and Achitophel* and other satires he has been retained by the Crown and entrusted with the case for the prosecution. In *Absalom and Achitophel* his attitude was just right for satire. At this time he was free enough to be witty and to introduce, in the characters of Zimri and Achitophel, that fine raillery in which the nicest and most delicate touches of satire are to be found.

It is in this poem that Dryden revealed the satirical possibilities of the heroic couplet. He exposes the stinginess of Bethel by telling that

*His Cooks, with long disuse, their trade forgot;  
Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.*

About Shaftesbury he writes that he is

*For close designs and crooked counsels fit.  
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit.....  
In friendship false, implacable in hate  
Resolved to ruin or to rule the state.*

In these two couplets the cadence, the alliteration, the antithesis, and the poly-syllabic emphasis of 'Sagacious', 'turbulent', 'implacable', unite to give the words an air of authority and finality which over-whelms any objection. "The cumulative effect of a sequence of such couplets is, of course, still more devastating. For rhetorical purposes - for generating excitement, compelling assent, concentrating meaning - there is no measure comparable in effectiveness to the heroic couplet.

The poet deepened the significance of this satire by finding a biblical parallel for the contemporary political situation of conspiracy and agitation. "When we feel that it has all happened before, the present event assumes an importance, and even a sort of inevitability that makes it more significant, and, as Dryden must have wished, more dangerous. 'Poesy', we are told by Bacon, '.....is nothing else but feigned history.' By basing his *Absalom and Achitophel* on true history,

and applying actual events of the past to his own times, Dryden served his purpose far more effectively than he could have done if he had invented a fiction of his own. A story, too, that was taken from the Bible had a special sort of prestige - more especially, of course, for a generation that knew its Bible for better than most of us know ours today, and for whom the Old Testament was still a sacred book, and not just an interesting collection of Hebrew literature. This last point is of some importance, for the biblical parallel gave still greater audacity to the daring art of the poet who could compare Charles II with King David on the ground that both of them had fathered so many bastards King David, we are told

*His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart  
To wives and slaves; and, wide, as his command,  
Scattered his maker's image through the land."*

And so, too, in his own amiable and indiscriminating fashion, had Charles II. All through the poem, indeed, the contemporary reader had the satisfaction of following Dryden's ingenious application of ancient history to current events and characters: a satisfaction similar to that which the readers of Pope's imitations of Horace or Johnson's imitations of Juvenal obtained from their substitution of modern names for those of ancient Rome." —(Sutherland)

**Q. 10. "Dryden's best work is inspired by the sanity that inhabits at the heart of things." Discuss this remark with reference to Dryden's political and moral outlook in *Absalom and Achitophel*.**

The above quotation refers to the peculiar character of Dryden's satire. He is completely different from his predecessors. Before him, it was a prevalent practice among satirists that they should affect immense moral indignation at the evils they attacked. Juvenal and Persius are responsible for this; even Dryden did not put an end to that practice because the same attitude is perceptible in his successors, particularly in Lloyd and Churchill. This moral indignation becomes very tiresome when the subject happens to be political. It does not become a political satirist 'to lose his temper and to rare and rant and denounce with the air of an

inspired Prophet.' Dryden did not follow the prevalent tradition. Dryden's attitude towards his subject is one of a cool and not ill-humoured scorn. The persons whom he has satirised are shown to be scoundrels, and they are more contemptible than vicious. The well known line

*They got a villain and we lost a fool*

expresses that attitude admirable.

Dryden is the only satirist in English Literature who never abused his powers for personal ends. He did not spoil his ink in abusing his political or literary enemies. He attacked Settle and Shadwell, no doubt; but he did so when both of them had assailed him in the most virulent and unprovoked fashion. He did not care to notice many persons who became his enemies after *Absalom and Achitophel* was published. We can not trace any personal grudge against anyone. "The character of Zimri was not only perfectly true and just, but was also a fair literary tit-for-tat in return for the *Rehearsal*; nor did Buckingham's foolish rejoinder provoke the poet to say another word. Last of all, in no part of his satires is there the slightest reflection on Rochester, notwithstanding the disgraceful conduct of which he had been guilty. Rochester was dead, leaving no heirs and very few friends, so that any time during the twenty years which Dryden survived him satirical allusion would have been safe and easy. But Dryden was far too manly to war with the dead and far too manly even to indulge, as his great follower did, in vicious flings at the living."

—(Saintsbury)

( Also read Dryden as a satirist ).

**Q. 11.** "A reconciliation between the scholarly ideal and popular inspiration." Justify this description of *Absalom and Achitophel*.

**Answer.** Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* is a marvellous blend of the classical and contemporary satire. It is based on the one hand, on the principles of satire as enunciated by Horace, Juvenal and Persius, and on the other hand, it has not totally neglected the trends and features of the contemporary



satire, so popular among the Restoration readers. We will have to analyse the salient features of the both, in order to critically evaluate the fusion of the classical and the contemporary in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*.

It was in the year 1680 that Dryden began to pay some attention to political and religious controversies. It is said that he was directly encouraged to write *Absalom and Achitophel* by Charles II. The satire that he wrote under a political excitement and fervour made him the first great satirist in Europe. The poem was published about the middle of November 1681, a week or so before the grand jury acquitted Shaftesbury from the charges of high treason. "At no time before, and hardly at any time since, did party spirit run higher, and though the immediate object of the poem was defeated by the fidelity of the brisk boys of the city to their leader, there is no question that the poem worked powerfully among the influences which after the most desperate struggle, sort of open warfare, in which any English sovereign has ever been engaged, finally won for Charles the Victory over Exclusionists, by means least ostensibly constitutional and legitimate." Thus it is clear that the chief inspiration was political and its contemporary fame and popularity was solely due to its advocacy of a political cause.

But the later popularity of the poem depends upon its being modelled on the classical and contemporary French satires. His views on satire are expressed in the preface to the translation of Juvenal. In this long preface, well known as an *Essay on satire* he has made a comparison between Horace, Juvenal and Persius. He has a respect for Horace for his urbanity and helpfulness of lesson but prefers Juvenal for the liveliness of comic force and vivacity of style. In his *Absalom and Achitophel* he has followed the manners of Horace, as is shown in the character of Zimri. His views on satire are summed in : "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily ! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a block-head, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms !" For Dryden, a satirist ought to have some moralizing dignity and Christian charity, he has condemned the personal element in satire. He followed the classical principles of satire which are

stated to be : subject should be one; the satirist should condemn a single vice in the poem; he must extol one single virtue; the tone should be lively and pleasant, with due respect for good manners; the metre of the heroic line of ten syllables should be preferable to the short verse of *Hudibras*.

Dryden has dexterously blended the popular inspiration and scholarly ideal in his *Absalom and Achitophel*. No poem was more based on the contemporary topic and popular in its time than *Absalom* was; it is equally true that no poem of the kind has achieved a greater fame in the literary world than *Absalom and Achitophel*; it is because of its being modelled on classical models. *Absalom and Achitophel* depicts the restoration times, particularly its political issues on the one hand, and, on the other, provides, synthetically, the illustration of the classical satire as written by Horace, Juvenal and Persius.

**Q. 12. Show that *Absalom and Achitophel* is the characteristic product of the Restoration Age.**

**Answer.** Prof. Cazamian has remarked that great influences of the time had united to make the Restoration an age of satire. "A society where the various forms of worldly life are in the ascendant raises to its highest point the respect for conventional values; and while orthodox morality suffers an eclipse, fashion and genteel taste in return hold undivided sway. The rational tone of thought helps to disentangle and formulate all rules; and the clearness of the principles renders their application more easy. Judging and condemning, as a result, grow more simple and more facile operations. In the exclusive circle of the cultured, the art of expressing one's judgment in literary terms becomes a highly natural exercise of the critical faculty; and the appeal to enlightened opinion is an unfailing means to acquire prestige and success.

"On the otherhand, with the re-establishment of the monarchy there breaks out an insurrection of instincts that have long been held in check; the revolt against hypocrisy; and the spirit of mockery or of satire brings with it to those consciences that are becoming liberated the feeling of sincerity, as well as that of independence. The open denunciation of false spiritual authorities becomes not only a duty,

but a pleasure; and if with the desire for insanity there mingles the relish for licentiousness, if the audacity of thought, and the frankness of utterance, deviate into cynicism, this is only a reaction so natural that no one is tempted to wonder at it. The Restoration satirists are most often realistic and crude, just as they are biting to a degree; for, generally speaking, they are not very sure whether they are writing in the name of morality and in its defence, or against the notion that others have formed of it.....

“Political strife also accounts for the violence of the tone. The Civil War, and the Protectorate had known the most violent polemics; Milton had fought as desperately as any other. But in the controversies of the various sects, the vehemence sprang from the earnestness of the passion and the idea. The Restoration materialises and lowers even these conflicts. When political opposition is again stirred up, and the skirmishing of pamphlets flames up anew, party spirit replaces religious zeal. The battle is here transferred to another plane; and the ardour which formerly spent itself in falminating and learned treatises, now pours itself forth in lampoons and satires. Henceforth, Whigs and Tories will engage in a paper war for the benefit of public opinion.

“But there is something else at work in the literary atmosphere of the time. Classical influences favour a mode of expression which the tradition of the ages has consecrated. In ancient days the satirist was honoured; the study of the classics is now promoting familiarity with the works of Persius, Horace and Juvenal; these old masters are translated and imitated; did they not aim their shafts at the eternal enemies of wisdom, and was the man of those days in any way different from the man of today? Before long, the contemporary mind awakes to the piquancy of anachronism, and of a suggestively bold application, or of an adaptation that lends a happily modern note to the things of the past. Besides, satire is in fashion with the French, and Boileau is its brilliant exponent. This is revived a scholarly and somewhat artificial style of writing, that in England could claim the precedents of Hall and Donne.”

*Absalom and Achitophel* is the characteristic product of the age because it represents the satirical spirit of the restoration times. Its outstanding quality is that it represents a reconciliation between the scholarly ideal and popular inspiration. Its popularity rests on its biblical setting, its imaginative theme, its direct allusions, and the portraits which can easily be identified with some contemporary personage. "It is scholarly by virtue of its department, its relative moderation, the choice and dignity of its expression, the generality of the thought, and the standard value, that impersonal significance, which Dryden has vested in the individual and at the same time representative figures of Zimri, Achitophel, and Shimei."

—(Cazamian)

**Q. 13. Illustrate, from *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden's**

- (i) Method of character drawing;**
- (ii) Power of reasoning in verse;**
- (iii) Handling of the heroic couplet;**
- (iv) Appropriateness of the Biblical analogy to the satiric purpose.**

**(i) Method of character drawing.**—Dryden's method of character drawing is distinct from that of his predecessors. He stands almost alone. Satirists are prone to the error of attacking either mere types or definitely marked individuals. Thus, Regnier and other French satirists have attacked the types; while as Pope has attacked the individuals. In the first case, when a satirist attacks the type, the point and zest of the thing are lost and the satire becomes a declamation against vice and folly in the abstract. In the second case, when a satirist attacks on individual, "a suspicion of personal pigne comes in, and it is felt that the requirement of art, the disengagement of the general law from the individual instance, is not sufficiently attended to." But Dryden has seldom fallen into either of these evils. His figures are always at once types and individuals. For example, Zimri is Buckingham as well as an idle grand seigneur who plays at politics and learning; Achitophel is Shaftesbury as well as an abstract intriguer; Shimei is Bethel as well as a sectarian politician.

(Read Dryden's characterization in the introduction)

(ii) **Power of reasoning in verse**—In *Absalom and Achitophel* Dryden displays singular faculty of verse argument. He was by no means the first poet who argued in verse; John Davies was his forerunner. Dryden had a considerable touch of the scholastic in his mind. "He delights at all times in the formulas of the schools, and his various literary criticisms are frequently very fair specimens of deductive reasoning. The bent of his mind, moreover, was of that peculiar kind which delights in arguing a point. Something of this may be traced in the singular variety not to say inconsistency, even of his literary judgements. He sees, for the time being, only the point which he has set himself to prove, and is quite careless of the fact that he has proved something very different yesterday, and is very likely to prove something different still tomorrow. But for the purpose of didactic he had special equipments unconnected with his merely logical power. He was at all times singularly happy and fertile in the art of illustration, and of concealing the weakness of an argument in the most convincing way, by a happy simile or jest." —(Saintsbury)

No poet has argued in verse like Dryden. The debate between Absalom and Achitophel as well as the speeches at Absalom and David show the poet's capacity for packing arguments into verse and for transforming political oratory into incandescent poetry. Professor Grierson has compared Absalom's speeches with those of Disraeli. The speeches in *Absalom and Achitophel*, besides reminding us of brilliant platform speeches, give the poem something of an epic dignity as well. The opening lines of the speech, of Absalom, quoted below, reminds us of speeches of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

"Auspicious prince, at whose nativity  
Some royal planet ruled the southern sky,  
Thy longing country's darling and desire,  
Their cloudly pillar and their guardian fire,  
Their second Moses, whose extended wand  
Divides the seas and shows the promised land,  
Whose dawning day in every distant age

*Has exercised the sacred prophet's rage,  
 The people's prayer, the glad diviner's theme,  
 The young men's vision, and the old men's dream  
 Thee saviour, thee the nation's vows confess,  
 And never satisfied with seeing bless.  
 Swift, unspoken pomps thy steps proclaim,  
 And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.*

(iii) **Handling of the Heroic Couplet:**— In *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden has shown the wonderful command over the heroic couplet of which he had displayed the beginnings in his early poems, and which had, in twenty years of play-writing, been exercised and developed. At this time he had become very skilful in the use of it. Prof. Saintsbury has remarked: "The versification of English satire before Dryden had been almost without exception harsh and rugged. There are whole passages of Marston and of Donne, as well as more rarely of Hall, which can only be recognised as verse by the rattle of the rhymes and by a diligent scansion with the finger. Something the same, allowing for the influence of Waller and his school, may be said of Marvell and even of Oldham. Mean while the octosyllabic satire of Cleveland, Butler and others, though less violently uncouth than the decasyllables, was purposely grotesque. There is some difference of opinion as to how far the heroic satirists themselves were intentionally rugged. Donne, when he chose, could write with perfect sweetness, and Marston could be smooth enough in blank verse. It has been thought that some mistaken classical tradition made the early satirists adopt their jaw breaking style, and there may be something to be said for this. But I think that regard must, in fairness, also be had to the very imperfect command of the couplet which they possessed. The languid cadence of its then ordinary form was unsuited for satire, and the satirists had not the art of quickening and varying it. Hence the only resource was to make it as like prose as possible. But Dryden was in no such case. His native gifts and his enormous practice in play-writing had made the couplet as natural a vehicle to him for any form of discourse as blank verse or as plain prose. The form of it too, which he had most affected, was specially suited for satire. In the first place this form had, as has already been noted, a remarkably

varied cadence; in the second, its strong anti-thesis and smart telling hits lent themselves to personal description and attack with consummate ease. There are passages of Dryden's satires in which every couplet has not only the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The rapidity of movement from one couplet to the other is another remarkable characteristic. Even Pope, master as he was of verse, often fell into the fault of isolating his couplets too much, as if he expected applause between each, and wished to give time for it. Dryden's verse on the other hand strides along with a careless olympian motion, as if the writer were looking at his victims rather with a kind of good humoured scorn than with any elaborate triumph."

**(iv) Appropriateness of the Biblical Analogy:—**

Dryden would not have been so popular and accomplished a satirist, had he been perfectly original in his theme, plan and its execution. The Biblical personages and scenes were thought to be very useful for satirical purposes. The Duke of Monmouth was compared to Absalom by a pamphleteer; and Shaftesbury had already been dubbed as Achitophel by a satirist. "In this ready made frame, Dryden displayed all the classical power of form. Aided by a clear and well thought out plan, his construction acquires an architectural quality, of which English literature leaving Milton aside had offered few examples since the instinctive creations of Shakespeare; though the intellectualised art of Dryden, to tell the truth, does not quite re-discover in its integrity the instinctive secret of the logic of life."—(Cazamian)

Referring to the appropriateness of the Biblical analogy Prof. A. W. Ward has remarked; "*Absalom and Achitophel* veils its political satire under the transparent disguise of one of the most familiar episodes of Old Testament history, which the existing crisis in English affairs resembled sufficiently to make the allegory apposite and its interpretation easy. The attention of the English public, and, more especially, that of the citizens of London, with whom the decision of the immediate political issue lay, was sure to be arrested by a series of characters whose names and distinctive features were borrowed from the Old Testament, and the analogy between Charles II's and David's early exile and final triumphant establishment on the throne was a commonplace of restoration Poetry. Indeed, the actual notion of an

adaptatation of the story of Achitophel's wiles as 'the picture of a wicked politician' was not new to English controversial literature; in 1680, only a few months before Dryden's poem, had applied the name Achitophel with some other opprobrious names, to Shaftesbury. For the rest, Dryden, with the *Grandezza* habitual to him, was careless about filling the secondary figures of his satire exactly with their scriptural *aliases*, or boring the reader by a scrupulous fidelity or even consistency of detail."

**Q. 14** "Absalom and Achitophel" if it be considered as a poem political and controversial, it will be found to comprise all the excellence of which the subject is susceptible." How far do you agree to Dr. Johnson's criticism of Dryden's satire. ?

**Answer.** *Absalom and Achitophel* is so famous a satire that a general criticism would be superfluous. As a political and controversial poem, it comprises all those points of excellence which make a political or controversial poem a piece of immortal literature. According to Dr. Johnson himself "acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of characters, variety and vigour of sentiment, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers; and all these raised to such a height as an scarcely be found in any other English composition."

The poem would have been subjected to the doom of a purely political poem had it not been based on a scripture allegory Dryden, in so doing, elevated satire to epic dignity; and, in his genesal treatment of the subject,,he defied comparison. According to Courthope "His satire stands mid-way between the libellous personality of Marvell and the indiscriminate invective of Oldham. The loftiness of his aim is indicated by the tone of his Preface."

The tone of the poem is lofty and dignified. The speeches, of Absalom and David, are proper to epic or grave drama, such as we should expect in a heroic poem or play. Dryden called his work a poem, not a satire. Occasional archaisms, not easily found in Dryden's natural style, point



direct to the influence of the English epics. After *Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* comes into fame and vogue. The epic dignity of the poem is highest in the scene of the temptation, in Absalom's appeal to the people and in the conclusion. Referring to the satiric grandeur of the poem Verall has observed: "The work is really *unique*; there is no parallel in Dryden or else where known to me. It bears no resemblance as a whole to Roman satire.....it does contain important satiric elements in the portraits, of which the representation of Buckingham as Zimri may be taken as a specimen. The figure of 'Achitophel' is partly satiric.....And it is these elements or passages in the work, partly because they are detachable and quotable, that are perhaps the best known. But they do not cover the type, and we must classify the poem, it is best to call it '*epyllion*', or epic in miniature, comprising satiric elements.....the gorgeous Muse of satire comes sweeping by, draped in robes borrowed from her more august sisters Epic and Tragedy, but the robes are essential to the performance.'

Dr. Johnson has not failed to point out the faults of the poem. According to him, "Some lines are inelegant and improper, and too many are irreligiously licentious. The original structure of the poem was defective; allegories drawn to great length will always break; Charles could not run continually parallel with David.

"The subject had likewise another inconvenience: it admitted little imagery or description, and a long poem of mere sentiments easily becomes tedious; though all the parts are forcible, and every line kindles new rapture, the reader, if not relieved by the interposition of something that soothes the fancy, grows weary of admiration, and defers the rest."

**Q. 15.** "*Absalom and Achitophel* forms an era in the history of English classical satire." Justify.

**Ans.** Apart from the occasion of the poem and the political controversy it involved, *Absalom and Achitophel* has become an immortal piece of literature on account of its being modelled on the French and classical satires. Dryden had translated the satires of Horace, Juvenal and Persius and had prefixed it with a long treatise, known as *An Essay on Satire*.

In this essay he made a comparison between the satirical Muses of three great Roman satirists. He preferred Juvenal for the liveliness of the comic force and vivacity of style, though he had a greater esteem for Horace for the urbanity and helpfulness of his lessons. However, he followed the manner of Horace in his *Absalom and Achitophel*. According to his own definition of satire, it is too near a sermon and becomes a purely artificial form. "So strong is the authority of the classical ideal, derived from the ancients, that Dryden does not dare to recognize and hail the very life of satirical inspiration where it is to be found: in the works of a Butler, a Marvell or in his own writings .....He only places his *Absalom*, modestly, in the line of Varro. The artificial kind which he recommends will only be saved from mere imitation by the systematic use of anachronism, by frank and strictly modernized adaptations of ancient themes."

Referring to the classical qualities of *Absalom and Achitophel*, Ward has observed: "In undertaking the composition of this great satire.....Dryden had found his great literary opportunity; and, of this, he took advantage in a spirit far removed from that of either the hired bravos or the spiteful lampooners of his age. For this opportunity he had been unconsciously preparing himself as a dramatist; and it was in the nature of things, and in accordance with the responsiveness of his genius to the calls made upon it by time and circumstance that, in the season of a great political crisis, he should have rapidly perceived his chance of decisively influencing public opinion by an exposure of the aims and methods of the party of revolution. This he proposed to accomplish, not by a poetic summary of the rights of the case, or by a sermon in verse on the sins of factiousness, corruption and treason, but by holding up the times and their troubles, with no magisterial air or dictatorial gesture, a mirror in which, under a happily contrived disguise, the true friends and the real foes of their king and country should be recognized. This was the Varronian form of satire afterwards commended by him, with a well-warranted self consciousness, to which, among the ancients, several of Lucan's *Dialogues* and, among the moderns, the *Encomium Moriale* of Erasmus belong."

Prof. Cazamian is of the opinion that Dryden's *Abraham and Achitophel* marks a reconciliation between the scholarly ideal and popular inspiration. "It remains popular because of its Biblical setting, its imaginative theme, its direct allusions, and portraits to which the reader could always attach a name. It is scholarly by virtue of its deportment, its relative moderation, the choice and the dignity of its expression, the generality of the thought, and that standard value, that impersonal significance, which Dryden has vested in the individual and at the same time representative figures of Zimri, Achitophel, and Shemei.

**Q. 16. "To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion, of our metre, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments." Discuss.**

**Ans.** Dryden did not discover the couplet—that unit of verse in which a pair of ten-syllabled iambic lines rhyme at the end. It was quite popular, in both varieties, the blank verse and the couplet, in the Elizabethan age. Blank verse, in the hands of Shakespeare and Milton, became very popular because they exploited its *rythmical variety* to the utmost. "In a play like *The Tempest*, substitutions and metrical irregularities are almost the rule rather than the exception; and yet, as if by a miracle, the underlying norm of the ten-syllabled iambic line holds the blank verse paragraphs together. Shakespeare's later contemporaries and successors, however, permitted the norm itself to crack, and anarchy came to reign in the realm of verse. By 1630.....the collapse of Blank verse was complete, and the way was opened for exploiting the possibilities of rythmetical regularity with reference to the ten-syllabled iambic line.

"There are couplets, enough and to spare, in Elizabethan drama. Strachey, after quoting some couplets from *Othello*, says that they might have been written by Pope himself. However, it was Waller who 'fully apprehended the implications of regularity.....He perceived what followed logically from rhyme. He saw that regularity implied balance, that balance implied antithesis; he saw that balance also implied

simplicity, that simplicity implied clarity and that clarity implied exactitude. Many poets have since the time of Waller wielded the couplet as a poetic instrument, but two names stand foremost in the history of couplet. If Shakespeare and Milton are, in their different ways, the grand monarchs of the realm of Blank verse, Dryden and Pope may be described similarly as the grand monarchs of the sister realm of the couplet. Pope, like Milton, was a great master indeed, but a master only of a single style; Dryden, like Shakespeare himself, was a master of many styles, and this he showed in the way he handled the heroic couplet.

"We have pointed out that Dryden did not invent the couplet. Some of his earlier poems were, in fact, written in quatrains; and, in the later part of his dramatic career, Dryden substituted blank verse in the place of his long loved mistress, rhyme. Dryden was thus neither the originator nor a fanatic practitioner of the couplet; he found it a convenient, efficient and flexible instrument of verse,—that really was all. From the first, Dryden gave to his couplets what Saintsbury has figuratively called 'the ring as of a great bronze coin thrown down on marble'; with practice, Dryden was able to make the couplet as fit a vehicle for rearing up an edifice of argument, as ready to sing the praises of a Barzillai as it is to scream the detraction of a Zimri or a Shimei.

"Dryden's poetry, superlatively clever as it is and very good of its kind, rarely transports us above our surroundings; it does not give us intimations of something other than mere terrestrial life; it does not quicken or refine our sensibilities and does not impart to us, again and again, feeling that we are somehow greater than we are. Dryden's verification is clear accurate, and logically unexceptionable, his satires are conceived and executed by his penetrating intelligence; the result is poetry, poetry of a very high order indeed—and yet not the highest. Reading *Absalom and Achitophel* we do admire Dryden's wit, the sweep of his intelligence, his metrical resilience, his sheer artistry; but since we know also that he is not writing from the deeper levels of his soul, we at length regretfully turn away from Dryden, to the tragedies of Shakes-

peare, the symphonies of Milton and the moving lyrics of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley.

**Q. 17 It is said that Dryden cast his satire in the epic mould. How far do you subscribe to this view ? Illustrate your answer.**

*Absalom and Achitophel* is an announcement and a prophecy of the royal triumph, and an appeal to the nation for grateful acquiescence.

The tone of the poem is lofty and dignified. It imparts the poem the likeness of epic grandeur. The speeches of Absalom, Achitophel and David are proper to epic or serious drama, such as the reader should expect in a heroic poem or play. Dryden called his work a poem rather than a satire. There are many an influence perceptible in this poem: Occasional archaism, speech cast in the epic mould, Biblical analogy, grand similes and elevated style. After *Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, it is Dryden's *Absalom* that come into fame and vogue. The epic dignity of the poem is highest in the scene of the temptation, in Absalom's appeal to the people and in the conclusion.

Referring to the epic qualities of the poem, Grierson has remarked: "What *Absalom and Achitophel* reminds one of quite as much as of *Paradise Lost*, is a political platform speech, not of Burke, who in his greater passages is more Miltonic than Dryden, but, say, of Lord Beaconsfield. There is the same blend of dignity and elevation with passage of direct, incisive, effective satire; the same magnanimity (Pope and Gladstone were more intense and savage); and both in the higher flights and satiric onslaughts the same touch of the conscious artist, as of one contemplating even as he speaks the admirable point of his own wit, the eloquent turn and cadence of his sentences.....Dryden's poetry is oratorical, splendid oratory, argumentative, witty, satirical, weighty, felicitous.....with all his great gifts Dryden was not a great poet, because he believed in nothing.....He never writes as one inspired by his subject in itself, which Dante declares is the secret of great poetry:

*To whom I thus: "count me but as one  
Who am the scribe of love; that when he breathes  
Take up my pen as he dictates write."*

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**DRYDEN  
ABSALOM  
AND  
ACHITOPHEL  
PART ONE**

**&**

**PART TWO**  
*By*  
**NAHUM TATE**  
*Revised and modified by Dryden*

## WHO IS WHO

<i>Abbethdin</i>	... Lord Chancellor
<i>Abdael</i>	... Duke of Albemarle.
<i>Absalom</i>	... Duke of Monmouth.
<i>Achitophel</i>	... Lord Shaftesbury.
<i>Adriel</i>	... Earl of Musgrave
<i>Agag</i>	... Sir E. B. Godfrey
<i>Amiel</i>	... Mr. Seymour, Speaker.
<i>Amri</i>	... Lord Chancellor Finch.
<i>Annabel</i>	... Duchess of Monmouth
<i>Arod</i>	... Sir W. Waller
<i>Asaph</i>	... Mr. Dryden.
<i>Balaam</i>	... Earl of Huntingdon.
<i>Balak</i>	... Burnet.
<i>Barzillai</i>	... Duke of Ormond.
<i>Bathsheba</i>	... Duchess of Portsmouth.
<i>Benaiah</i>	... General Sackville.
<i>Ben Jochanan</i>	... Johnson
<i>Bezaliel</i>	... Duke of Beaufort.
<i>Caleb</i>	... Lord Grey.
<i>Corah</i>	... Dr. Oates.
<i>David</i>	... King Charles II.
<i>Doeg</i>	... Settle.
<i>Egypt</i>	... France.
<i>Eliaſ</i>	... Earl of Arlington.
<i>Ethnic Plot</i>	... Popish Plot.
<i>Hebrew Priests</i>	{ Church of England
	{ Ministers.
<i>Hebron</i>	... Scotland.

<i>Helon</i>	... Lord Feversham.
<i>Hushai</i>	... Earl of Rochester, Hyde.
<i>Isbosheth</i>	... Richard Cromwell.
<i>Ishban</i>	... Sir R. Clifton.
<i>Israel</i>	... England.
<i>Issáchar</i>	... T. Thin, Esq.
<i>Jebusites</i>	... Papists.
<i>Jerusalem</i>	... London.
<i>Jonas</i>	... Sir W. Jones.
<i>Jotham</i>	... Marquis of Halifax.
<i>Jothran</i>	... Lord Dartmouth.
<i>Judas</i>	... Ferguson.
<i>Mephibosheth</i>	... Pordage.
<i>Michael</i>	... Queen Katharine.
<i>Nadab</i>	... Lord Howard of Escrick.
<i>Og</i>	... Shadwell.
<i>Othniel</i>	... Duke of Grafton.
<i>Pharaoh</i>	... French King.
<i>Phaleg</i>	... Forbes.
<i>Rabshakeh</i>	... Sir Thomas Player.
<i>Sagan of Jerusalem</i>	... Bishop of London.
<i>Sanhedrim</i>	... Parliament.
<i>Saul</i>	... Oliver.
<i>Sheva</i>	... S. R. L'Estrange.
<i>Shimei</i>	... Sheriff Bethel.
<i>Solymean Rout</i>	... London Rebels
<i>Tyre</i>	... Holland.
<i>Uzza</i>	... J. H.
<i>Western Dome</i>	... Dolben.
<i>Zadoch</i>	... Archbishop Sancroft.
<i>Zaken</i>	... Parliament-man.
<i>Ziloah</i>	... Sir J. Moor.
<i>Zimri</i>	... Duke of Buckingham.



## ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

### A POEM.

"Si propius stes

To capiat magis."

Horace, *Ars Poet.* 361.

### TO THE READER.

'Tis not my intention to make an apology for my poem : some will think it needs no excuse, and others will receive none. The design, I am sure, is honest; but he who draws his pen for one party must expect to make enemies of the other. For wit and fool are consequents of Whig and Tory : and every man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side. There's a treasury of merits in the Fanatic church as well as in the Papist, and a pennyworth to be had of saintship, honesty, and poetry, for the lewd, the factious, and the blockheads; but the longest chapter in Deuteronomy has not curses enough for an Anti Broomingham. My comfort is, their manifest prejudice to my cause will render their judgment of less authority against me. Yet if a poem have a genius, it will force its own reception in the world; for there is a sweetness in good verse, which tickles even while it hurts; and no man can be heartily angry with him who pleases him against his will. The commendation of adversaries is the greatest triumph of a writer, because it never comes unless extorted. But I can be satisfied on more easy terms : if I happen to please the more moderate sort, I shall be sure of an honest party and, in all probability, of the best judges; for the least concerned are commonly the least corrupt. And I confess I have laid in for those, by rebating the satire, where justice would allow it, from carrying too sharp an edge. They who can criticize so weakly as to imagine I have done my worst, may be convinced at their own cost that I can write severely with more ease than I can gently. I have but laughed at some men's follies, when I could have declaimed against their vices; and other men's virtues I have commended as freely as I have taxed their crimes.

And now, if you are a malicious reader, I expect you should return upon me that I affect to be thought more impartial than I am; but if men are not to be judged by their professions, God forgive you commonwealth's-men for professing so plausibly for the government. You cannot be so unconscionable as to charge me for not subscribing of my name; for that would reflect too grossly upon your own party, who never dare, though they have the advantage of a jury to secure them. If you like not my poem, the fault may possibly be in my writing, though 'tis hard for an author to judge against himself; but more probably 'tis in your morals, which cannot bear the truth of it. The violent on both sides will condemn the character of Absalom, as either too favourably or too hardly drawn; but they are not the violent whom I desire to please. The fault on the right hand is to extenuate, palliate, and indulge; and, to confess freely, I have endeavoured to commit it. Besides the respect which I owe his birth, I have a greater for his heroic virtues and David himself could not be more tender of the young man's life, than I would be of his reputation. But since the most excellent natures are always the most easy and, as being such, are the soonest perverted by ill counsels, especially when baited with fame and glory, it is no more a wonder that he withstood not the temptations of Achitophel than it was for Adam not to have resisted the two devils, the serpent and the woman. The conclusion of the story I purposely forebore to prosecute, because I could not obtain from myself to show Absalom unfortunate. The frame of it was cut out but for a picture to the waist; and if the draught be so far true, it is as much as I designed.

Were I the inventor, who am only the historian, I should certainly conclude the piece with the reconciliation of Absalom to David. And who knows but this may come to pass? Things were not brought to an extremity where I left the story: there seems yet to be room left for a composure; hereafter there may only be for pity. I have not so much as an uncharitable wish against Achitophel, but am content to be accused of a good natured error, and to hope with Origen, that the Devil himself may at last be

saved. For which reason, in this poem, he is neither brought to set his house in order, nor to dispose of his person afterwards as he in wisdom shall think fit. God is infinitely merciful; and his vicegerent is only not so, because he is not infinite.

The true end of satire is amendment of vices by correction. And he who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease ; for those are only in order to prevent the surgeon's work of an *Ense rescindendum*, which I wish not to my very enemies. To conclude all ; if the body politic have any analogy to the natural, in my weak judgment, an act of oblivion were as necessary in a hot distempered state as an opiate would be in a raging fever.

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# WORDS-MEANINGS

—*Si propius stes/ To Capiet Magis* : If you stand nearer it will attract you more.

## TO THE READER

**Intention** : purpose, aim ; **Apology** : something spoken in defence ; acknowledgement of offence and expression of regret ; poor substitute ( with - - for ) ; **Excuse** : apology, that which serves to excuse ; **Design** : Plan ; **Honest** : sincere ; *to draw one's pen* : to compose, to write ; **Wit** : sense ; intellect, ingenuity in connecting amusingly incongruous ideas, person gifted with this power , **Consequents** : acquiescences, assents ; **Whig** : Whiggamore, first applied to the Scottish insurgents in 1648 and 1666 ; and so, in 1679, to the Exclusionists who opposed the succession of the Duke of York. **Tory** : was first applied to the dispossessed Irish who plundered the English settlers ; later, to any Irish Catholic or royalist in arms ; and so, in 1679, to members of the king's party.

**Knave** : rogue ; **Contrary** : opposite ; **Phanatick** : fanatic, filled with abnormal enthusiasm, especially in religion ; **Papist** : Roman Catholics ; **Pennyworth** : somewhat ; **Saintship** : sanctity ; **Leud** : lewd, indecent ; **Factionous** : seditious ; one misguided by party-spirit ; **Block-heads** : fools ; **Deuteronomy** : the fifth book of Moses. 'Deuteronomy' means the second law. It commences with the continuation of the history narrated in the closing chapters of Numbers; and gives new laws of the children of Israel. The book is almost entirely made up of addresses delivered by Moses to the people. It also includes Moses' farewell speech and his warning to the people.

**Enow** : enough ; **Anti-Bromingham** : Tory ; The whigs were called 'Birmingham protestants', from the false coin counterfeited in that town. **Manifest prejudices** : visible, undoubted, bias or partiality (usually unfavourable) ; **Will render** : will bring about ; **Genius** : high power of spirit, taste, character, spirit ; **Reception** : welcome ; **Tickles** : makes itch with light touches ; **Triumph** : victory ; **Extorted** : wrung, got by force ; **Termes** : terms ; **Probability** : possibility ; **Rebating** :

diminishing, deducting; *Satyre* : satire; *Critize* : criticise; *Convinc'd* : agreed; *Severely* : bitterly; *Laught* : laughed; *Declaim'd* : took unrespectfully and criticised; *Vices* : ill-doings; *Vertues* : virtues; *Tax'd* : criticised, abhorred; *Malitious Reader* : a reader of malicious (=ill) manners; *Professions* : vocations; *Common-wealths-men* : There was a widespread belief that the whig extremists were working for the restoration of a commonwealth. Some of them had certainly been republicans. In 1679 Shaftesbury said that, assured of a Protestant succession and civil liberties, 'he would rather be under kingly government, but if he could not be satisfied of that .....he was for a Common-wealth.'

*Unconscionable* : not aware of; *Subscribing* : putting ...on; *Woud* : would; *Reflect* : to bring to light; *Grosly* : grossly; vaguely; *Jury* : the discriminator; *Morals* : virtues; *Violent* : a man of rash attitude; *Extenuate* : to make less blameworthy; *Palliate* : to relieve without curing, to excuse; *Indulge* : to gratify, to give free course to; *Endeavour'd* : endeavoured, tried; *Heroique vertues* : valour, bravery; *Coud* : could; *Tender* : affectionate; *Reputation* : fame; *Excellent Natures* : virtuous fellows; *Perverted* : changed; *Ill Counsels* : harmful pieces of advice; *Baited with* : tempted by; *Withstood not* : could not stand against; *Resisted* : checked; *two Devils* : Satan and woman; *Purposely* : thoughtfully; *forbore* : took into hand; *Prosecute* : to carry out; *Shew* : show; *Frame* : method, style; *Wast* : wastage; *Draught* : act or action of drawing; design; *Design'd* : thought.

*Inventour* : inventor; *Shoud* : should; *Conclude* : finish; *Reconcilement* : union; *Extremity* : zenith; *Composure* : reconciliation; *Content* : satisfied with; *Accus'd* : charged of; *Error* : error; *Origen* : some of Origen's adversaries accused him of teaching 'diabolus esse salvandum'. References to Shaftesbury as a rebellious diabolus are common; *Dispose* : to sell; *Wisedom* : wisdom; *Infinitely* : greatly; *Vicegerent* : holder of delegated authority.

*Amendment* : reforming; *Honestly* : sincerely; *Offendour* : offender; *Inveterate* : fatal, *Chyrurgeon's work* : surgeon's work; *Ense Rescindendum* : something to be cut off with the sword; *Politique* : politic; *Analogy* : similarity; *Oblivion* : forgetfulness;

*Distemper'd* : agitated ; *Opiate* : opium ; *Raging fever* : great and fatal fever.

**Critical appreciation** to Dryden's preface on *Absalom and Achitophel*.

The epigraph is from Horace, *De Ars poetica*, ll. 361-2  
'If you stand nearer it will attract you more.'

Dryden writes the preface in form of an apology but he is sure that some will receive the poem favourably whereas some people will talk ill of it. He assures the readers that his plan is sincere but if any poet composes his poem in favour of one party, he will arouse the other party against him. One party thinks it full of wit, while the other justifies them as fools. It is but natural. Birds of a feather flock together. "Every man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side." Every party has got some genius but when mis-applied it becomes a curse.

*Some critical remarks by John Dryden :*

1. "If a poem have a Genius, it will force its own reception in the world For there's a sweetness in good Verse, which Tickles even while it Hurts : And, no man can be heartily angry with him, who pleases him against his will."

2. The commendation of Adversaries, is the greatest Triumph of a writer, because it never comes unless Extorted.

3. The least concern'd, are commonly the least corrupt. .

4. If you like not my poem, the fault may, possibly, be in my writing : (though 'tis hard for an Authour to judge against himself.) But, more probably, 'tis in your Morals, which cannot bear the truth of it.

5. The end of satire, is the amendment of vices by correction, and he who writes honestly, is no more an enemy to the offender, than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease

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*David and Absalom*

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,  
 Before polygamy was made a sin,  
 When man on many multiplied his kind,  
 Ere one to one was cursedly confined,  
 When nature prompted and no law denied,  
 Promiscuous use of concubine and bride,  
 Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart  
 His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
 To wives and slaves, and, wide as his command,  
 Scattered his Maker's image through the land. 10  
 Michal, of royal blood, the crown did wear,  
 A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care :  
 Not so the rest ; for several mothers bore  
 To god-like David several sons before.  
 But since like slaves his beds they did ascend,  
 No true succession could their seed attend.  
 Of all this numerous progeny was none.  
 So beautiful, so brave, as Absalon :  
 Whether, inspired by some diviner lust,  
 His father got him with a greater gust, 20  
 Or that his conscious destiny made way  
 By manly beauty to imperial sway.  
 Early in foreign fields he won renown  
 With kings and states allied to Israel's crown;  
 In peace the thoughts of war he could remove  
 And seemed as he were only born for love.  
 Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,  
 In him alone 'twas natural to please ;  
 His motions all accompanied with grace,  
 And Paradise was opened in his face. 30  
 With secret joy indulgent David viewed  
 His youthful image in his son renewed;  
 To all his wishes nothing he denied

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*ere:* before; *polygamy:* marrying more than one wife;  
*prompted:* urged; *promiscuous :* indiscriminate ; *Concubine:* a wife  
 of some one else and attached to another; *ascend:* climb up;  
*imperial:* royal; *indulgent:* engrossed in; *renewed:* took another  
 birth.

In olden times when, before the priesthood began, before polygamy (=marrying more than one wife) was considered sin, when man did not multiply on plural-sexes (=men and women), nature was the be-all and end-all.

[This is a satire on the reign of Charles II.]

**Then** there was a time when females married to others used to take any husband they liked; when girls before marriage could be kept easily as wives. Charles II reigned. He had no issue from her wife. He had no legitimate son. He was a slave to any woman in beauty and in grace. His wife's name was Catharine of Braganza. She did not yield any son to him. She was like an ungrateful soil. But the others were fertile.

There was a lady who brought forth of him the duke of Buckingham. He was very brave. Heaven knows he was produced of passion or of divinity. He was possessed of manly grace and of imperial command. He won great fame in foreign battles attacking against Holland and against France. Israel is England. People who had a touch with the English crown had a deep regard for him, others were always to him at daggers drawn. During the peaceful days he was very noble and it seemed he had never thought of war. He had always been loving and generous. He was such a graceful person as could never be seen throughout world. It seemed that paradise reigned there.

Charles II had a great fascination for him. He noticed that his son, duke of Buckingham, had his own image. He did all what his son liked. Denial was no where. He married him to Annabel. [Annabel or Anne, Countess of Buccleuch (1651-1732), was a lady of great beauty and intelligence. She was a patron of Dryden at court.]



And made the charming Annabel his bride.  
 What faults he had (for who from faults is free ?)  
 His father could not or he would not see.  
 Some warm excesses, which the law forbore,  
 Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er;  
 And Amnon's murder by a specious name  
 Was called a just revenge for injured fame. 40  
 Thus praised and loved, the noble youth remained,  
 While David undisturbed in Sion reigned.  
 But life can never be sincerely blest;  
 Heaven punishes the bad, and proves the best.

#### THE CONDITION OF ISRAEL

The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murmuring race  
 As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace;  
 God's pampered people, whom, debauched with ease  
 No king could govern nor no God could please;  
 Gods they had tried of every shape and size  
 That godsmiths could produce or priests devise; 50  
 These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,  
 Began to dream they wanted liberty;  
 And when no rule, no precedent was found  
 Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,  
 They led their wild desires to woods and caves  
 And thought that all but savages were slaves.

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*Annabel* : refer to paraphrase; *Forbore* : tolerated; *excesses* : making stronger; *purged* : mixed with; *specious* : grand; *Sion* : London; *pampered* : hated; *devise* : make; *blest* : blessed; *stretch* : elevation; *circumscribed* : baptised.

[cf. Dryden's *Almanzor's*—

I am as free as Nature first made Man,  
 Ere the bare Laws of servitude began,  
 When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

There is no man free from faults. If he had any fault in him, he was but a man, so James Scott (=the duke of Buckingham) had no doubt some faults in him which his father noticed but paid no attention to them. James Scott was in the prime of his youth and youth knows no restraint. He had some vices in him,

Dryden now probably refers to the vicious attack on Sir John Coventry (Ammon) in December 1670, at Monmouth's instigation as Coventry had publicly insulted the king. The hand of James Scott was also there. Thus James Scott was revered and hated by the Londoners. While Charles II (=David) reigned in London (=Sion) undisturbed.

Now Dryden comments. God is omnipotent. The vicious may survive for some time but in the end the murder is out. The vicious is punished. Virtue is rewarded and the vice is doomed to destruction.

### **The Condition of Israel.**

Israel is England. The English (=jews) are whimsical by nature. They are always unsatisfied with their lot. They are spoiled by coddling. This race is generally led away from virtue, whom neither king could govern nor even God could appease. They had made many experiments with the idol of gods which the priests could invent, rather godsmiths (—priests and clergy men) could devise. These people began to dream—like Adam—to gain liberty from the yoke of Charles II's reign.

[ Compare—

...true libertie

Is lost, which always with right Reason dwells  
Twinnd, and from her hath no dividual being :  
Reason in man obscur'd, or not obey'd,  
Immediately inordinate desires

When these Adam - wits (=Londoners) could not find any way to gain liberty, they began to dream of woods and caves and thought that all savages were slaves. \*

They who, when Saul was dead, without a blow  
 Made foolish Ishbosheth the crown forego;  
 Who banished David did from Hebron bring,  
 And with a general shout proclaimed him King; 60  
 Those very Jews who at their very best,  
 Their humour more than loyalty exprest,  
 Now wondered who so long they had obeyed  
 An idol monarch which their hands had made;  
 Thought they might ruin him they could create  
 Or melt him to that golden calf, a State.  
 But these were random bolts; no formed design  
 Nor interest made the factious crowd to join :  
 The sober part of Israel, free from stain,  
 Well knew the value of a peaceful reign; 70  
 And looking backward with a wise affright  
 Saw seams of wounds dishonest to the sight,  
 In contemplation of whose ugly scars  
 They cursed the memory of civil wars.  
 The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,  
 Inclined the balance to the better side;  
 And David's mildness managed it so well,  
 The bad found no occasion to rebel.  
 But when to sin our biassed nature leans,  
 The careful Devil is still at hand with means 80  
 And providently pimps for ill desires :  
 The good old cause, revived, a plot requires,  
 Plots, true or false are necessary things,  
 To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings.

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14. *Saul* ; Cromwell ; *Ishbosheth* : Richard Cromwell ;  
*Proclaimed* : announced ; *exprest* : expressed ; *design* : devise ;  
*affright* : terror ; *biassed* : fluctuated ; *pimps* : goads.

When Oliver Cromwell (= saul) was dead, they made Richard, Cromwell's son (= Ishbosheth) his heir but he was quite foolish and the empire was expelled of him. It brought back Charles II (= David) from Scotland (= Hebron) and he was proclaimed king of London.

[N. B. Charles was crowned king of Scots on January 1, 1651, and king of England on April 23, 1661.]

Those very jews (= Londoners), who had been genuine saviours to the reign of Cromwell were surprised as to whom they had been serving and found great solace in the reign of Charles II. They thought them very stupid as according to the *Exodus* XXXII, they had been attached to wealth as an object of worship. [Dryden seems to discredit the Whigs and their unsound political theories and their disloyalty to their king.]

Their political theories were aimless arrows or shods. They were only artificial. The gentle part of Israel (=the Great Britain) remained free from any pollution.

England was plunged into a civil war when Charles I was executed. The people of England had bitter experiences of the after-effects of the war. They noticed the bitter consequences of war and found them disgraceful. They thought very ugly of the severe effects of war. The moderate people qualified with the virtues, bent towards a good rule and called Charles II to the throne. The reign of Charles II was so noble that none could find any occasion to stand against him.

When our unmanageable nature leans to the wrong side, the devil is at hand. He has ample means to ruin us. When wrong notions become prevalent, the destruction is sure and rapid. Plots may be false or true, they may uplift the commonwealth or ruin kings.

[There was a widespread belief that the Whig extremists were working for the restoration of a commonwealth. Some of them had certainly been republicans. In 1679, Shaftesbury said that, assured of a Protestant succession and civil liberties, 'he would rather be under kingly government, but if he could not be satisfied of that... he was for a commonwealth.']

## THE JEBUSITES AND THEIR PLOT

The inhabitants of old Jerusalem.  
 Were Jebusites; the town so called from them,  
 And theirs the native right.  
 But when the chosen people grew more strong.  
 The rightful cause at length became the wrong;  
 And every loss the men of Jebus bore, 90  
 They still were thought God's enemies the more.  
 Thus worn and weakened, well or ill content,  
 Submit they must to David's government.  
 Impoverished and deprived of all command;  
 Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;  
 And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,  
 Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood.  
 This set the heathen priesthood in a flame,  
 For priests of all religions are the same.  
 Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be, 100  
 Stock, stone, on other homely pedigree,  
 In his defence his servants are as bold,  
 As if he had been born of beaten gold.  
 The Jewish Rabbins, though their enemies,  
 In this conclude them honest men and wise:  
 For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,  
 To espouse his cause by whom they eat and drink.  
 From hence began that Plot, the nation's curse,  
 Bad in itself but represented worse,  
 Raised in extremes, and in extremes decried, 110  
 With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied,  
 Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude,  
 But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude.

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*Jerusalem* : London ; *Jebusites* : Londoners ; *Jebus* :  
 refer to paraphrase ; *impoverished* : made weak ; *pedigree* :  
 legacy ; *Rabbins* : refer to paraphrase ; *winnowed* : made cap-  
 able of ; *Mass* : crowd.

### **The Jebusites and Their Plot**

The Jebusites are the Roman Catholics. The inhabitants of old Jerusalem (=London) were the Roman Catholics. When they became or thought to have become over powerful, they were worn and torn by ill-will, and impoverished by the penal law. They had to suffer a great deal.

They were, rather, thought the antagonists of God. Thus they had to submit them to David's (=Charles II's) reign. [The Jebusites were hated as the enemies of God.]

[These lines (ll. 94-97) describe the hardships the Roman Catholics were put to as a result of the religious controversies of the time, the disputes between the Catholics and the Anglicans.]

They were deprived of all the rights, taxes were doubled, their lands were confiscated, what was a disgrace to them, their Gods were burnt like common wood [an allusion to the wholesale destruction of images and relics at the Reformation.]

This made the Roman Catholic priests (=the Heathen priest hood) excited. It should be remembered that priests of all the nations are alike and worthy to be revered, of whatsoever their shape or size be—of stump-past store or homely genealogy. In his (=Pope's) defence, his children (=the Roman Catholics) are very bold and well-fortified.

The Protestant divines, though their enemies think them very wise and honest, had all to embrace and baptise them.

From here began the plot (=the Popish Plot (1678) of Titus Oates and his accomplices). England began to centre on the question of succession. Consequently two great parties were formed. The Whigs insisted on the exclusion of James, brother of Charles II, from the right succession, on the ground of his religion. The second party, the Tories supported the claim of James, Duke of York. To inflame the sentiments of the people on this question Titus Oates spread lies against the Papists.

Some truth there was, but dashed and brewed with lies  
 To please the fools and puzzle all the wise:  
 Succeeding times did equal folly call  
 Believing nothing or believing all.  
 The Egyptian rites the Jebusites embraced,  
 Where gods were recommended by their taste;  
 Such savoury deities must needs be good 120  
 As served at once for worship and for food,  
 By force they could not introduce these gods,  
 For ten to one in former days was odds:  
 So fraud was used, the sacrificer's trade;  
 Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.  
 Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews  
 And raked for converts even the court and stews:  
 Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took,  
 Because the fleece accompanies the flock.  
 Some thought they God's anointed meant to slay 130  
 By guns, invented since full many a day:  
 Our author swears it not; but who can know  
 How far the Devil and Jebusites may go ?

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PLOT

This plot, which failed for want of common sense,  
 Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence;  
 For as, when raging fevers boil the blood,  
 The standing lake soon floats into a flood,  
 And every hostile humour which before  
 Slept quite in its channels bubbles o'er;  
 So several factions from this first ferment 140  
 Work up to foam and threat the government.

*brewed* : chewed ; *recommended* : honoured ; *Savoury* :  
 delicious ; *fraud* : treachery ; *raked* : thought ; *swears* : takes  
 an oath ; *consequence* : result ; *hostile* : against ; *ferment* : read  
 the paraphrase.

The plot was the curse of nation. It was not only bad but was represented the worse of every thing. It was disparaged but Titus Oates asserted it positively. It was not examined well but it got absorbed in the multitude, although it was false and fanatical. There was some truth in the plot but it was full of lies. It was only to please the fools and perplex the wise folk. Succeeding generations called it equally folly to believing nothing or every thing.

The Jebusites (= the Roman Catholics) embraced the Egyptian rites (= the rites or catholic France.)

N. B. Egypt is Catholic France. Jibes at Catholic beliefs, and especially at the doctrine of trans-substantiation, were common during trials for the Plot.

In the Catholic France, gods were called or worshipped by their taste. Such agreeable deities are never good, as they are intended to serve all the purposes. They could not introduce these gods by force because the number of the Papists was very small.

[It has been estimated that the proportion of Anglicans to Papists at this time was about 180 to 1, and there were less than 100 Papist priests in the country.] intended to slay the Messiah. [A Benedictine lay brother, Thomas Pickering, and a layman John Grove, were tried on 17th December 1678 on a charge of attempting to shoot the king, and condemned to death. The Catholics were bitterly accused in this connection.] Dryden says that he does not swear but he is unable to predict how long the Devil and Jebusites may take steps.

### **The Consequence of the Plot**

This plot failed. Had it not been for this unfortunate thing, the Whigs would have carried on their plans. When any person is caught in the mias of fever, he becomes insane, so was the case with the general public.

The Popish plot created a terrible sensation bringing the political passions into white heat of intensity. People ran into a sort of frenzy and the false Achitophel (= Earl of Shaftesbury) took advantage of the occasion by organising his opposition party consisting of all disgruntled souls. Shaftesbury brought together all sorts of disgruntled factions and organised his opposition party. This first Ferment stands for the plot of Shaftesbury.



Some by their friends, more by themselves thought wise,  
 Opposed the power to which they could not rise:  
 Some had in courts been great and, thrown from thence.  
 Like fiends were hardened in impenitence.  
 Some by their Monarch's fatal mercy grown  
 From pardoned rebels kinsmen to the throne  
 Were raised in power and public office high;  
 Strong bands if, bands ungrateful men could tie,

### ACHITOPHEL

Of these the false Achitophel was first, 150  
 A name to all succeeding ages curst:  
 For close designs and crooked counsels fit,  
 Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,  
 Restless, unfixed in principles and place,  
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;  
 A fiery soul, which working out its way,  
 Fretted the pigmy body to decay.  
 And o'er-informed the tenement of clay  
 A daring pilot in extremity,  
 Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high, 160  
 He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,  
 Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit.  
 Great wits are sure to madness near allied  
 And thin partition do their bound divide;  
 Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,  
 Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?

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*Thence* : from there ; *monarch* : king ; *ungrateful* ; unfaithful ; *sagacious* : wise ; *disgrace* : insult ; *tenement* : principal ; *blest* : blessed with.

### PARAPHRASE

Some people with the help of their friends thinking them more wise than them, tried to gain position higher than them.

N.B. Collins says that the reference in these lines appear to have special relation (a) to the Earl of Huntingdon and lord Grey of Wark, (b) to the Duke of Buckingham, and (c) to Shaftesbury.

The Comparison is with Lucifer and the rebel angels, who, cast, out from heaven, settled in unrepentant evil in hell.

Shaftesbury draws a parallel between Charles, who in the opinion of the Whigs sought arbitrary power, and Lucifer, who said in his heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God". The parallel is ironic; Dryden is portraying Achitophel himself as an aspirant and tempter'.

### Achitophel

Of the opposition group, Earl of Shaftesbury was the top-most. He will be cursed for generations for his evil designs. He was very wise and bold. [Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-83) who fought on the royalist side in the Civil War, became one of Cromwell's council. He was associated with Charles II's return in 1660, and in 1672 was made Earl of Shaftesbury and Lord Chancellor. He conducted himself in that office with dignity and distinction. Dismissed in 1673, he moved into opposition, and became a leader of the country party. He had a wonderful faculty in speaking to a popular assembly and a particular talent to make others trust to his judgment, and depend on it. He had a wonderful faculty of opposing and running things down, but he had not the like force in building up.]

Shaftesbury came into sharp conflict with the Duke of York. Charles II stood in favour of his brother. Shaftesbury organised a large opposition with all the resources at his command. Shaftesbury was a man of lean body and visage, as if his eager soul! biting for anger at the clay of his body, desired to fret a passage through it.

Shaftesbury was a man of sickly constitution. He was very courageous. It seemed he was pleased of facing dangers. He was an admixture of courage and wit inspite of his lean and thin composure. There has been no great genius without some mixture of madness. Shaftesbury had a fiery soul in his pigmy body and over informing the tenement of clay (=body). He sought for the agitation and was totally unfit for a peaceful order. It is but natural that a man of intelligence is a mixture of two opposites. If Shaftesbury was weak of constitution, he was bold of heart. If it was possible, there could not have been any rhyme or reason in casting off the pleasures of society.

Punish a body which could not please,  
 Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease ?  
 And all to leave what with his toil he won  
 To that unfeathered two-legged thing, a son, 170  
 Got, while his soul did huddled notions try,  
 And born a shapeless lumps, like anarchy.  
 In friendship false, implacable in hate,  
 Resolved to ruin or to rule the state;  
 To compass this the triple bound he broke,  
 The pillars of the public safety shook,  
 And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke;  
 Then, seized with fear, yet still affecting fame,  
 Usurped a patriot's all-atoning name.  
 So easy still it porves in factious times 180  
 With public zeal to cancel private crimes.  
 How safe is treason and how sacred ill,  
 Where none can sin against the people's will,  
 Where crowds can wink and no offence be known.  
 Since in another's guilt they find their own !  
 Yet fame deserved no enemy can grudge;  
 The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.  
 In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin  
 With more discerning eyes or hands more clean,  
 Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress, 190  
 Swift of despatch and easy of access.  
 Oh ! had he been content to serve the crown  
 With virtues only proper to the gown,  
 Or had the rankness of the soil been freed.  
 From cockle that oppressed the noble seed,  
 David for him his tuneful harp had strung  
 And Heaven had wanted one immortal song.  
 But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand,  
 And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.

*opposed* : adversed to ; *fiends* : ghosts ; *imeritence* : obdu-  
 racy ; *curs* : cursed ; *fiery* : zealous ; *daring* : courageous ;  
*allied* : related to.

Shaftesbury was like an insolvent debtor of his physique. He was extravagant, devoid of comfort. In Platonic language he was a two-legged unfeathered animal. Shaftesbury's son, the second Earl, was without character. He was false, hateful and doomed to destruction than to rule a state. He broke the triple bound to gain power. [Shaftesbury actively promoted war against Holland in March 1672 by breaking the Triple Alliance between England, Sweden and Holland.] This made the pillars of the public safety tremble and Charles II had to make a secret alliance with king Louis XIV of France. [In return for subsidies Charles was to declare himself a Catholic at an opportune moment (which never came), and join with France against the Dutch. Shaftesbury shares the responsibility for involving England in the war against Holland in 1672, but hardly for fitting her to the foreign yoke of France.]

Lines 180 to 191 are said to have been added in the second edition in order to soften the anger of Shaftesbury. In the days of trouble, it requires great courage to cancel private crimes. Treason is safe and sacred where none can sin against the desire of the general public, where people can wink at other but no harm is done. The reason is in the guilt of others, they realise their own guilt. A great man is always a great man. Even his enemies will realize his greatness. We may hate the states-men but we cannot but praise Shaftesbury, the judge. In the court of London no Lord Chancellor (=Abbethdin) as just as Shaftesbury had been. He never took bribe. He was always ready to soften the distress of the needy. He was never slow in any enterprise and people could approach him directly. Had Shaftesbury been true to his 'gown', then Charles II would have addressed a song to him instead of a lament to Heaven. Thus Heaven would have lost one song addressed to it. Wild ambition is fluctuating. It is never constant. Virtue is ravished of a man.

Cf. "Greatness on goodness loves to slide, not stand  
And leaves for Fortunes ice-Virtue's firm land."

Achitophel, grown weary to possess 200  
 A lawful fame and lazy happiness,  
 Disdained the golden fruit to gather free  
 And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.  
 Now, manifest of crimes contrived long since,  
 He stood at bold defiance with his Prince,  
 Held up the buckler of the people's cause  
 Against the crown, and skulked behind the laps,  
 The wished occasion of the Plot he takes;  
 Some circumstances finds, but more he makes;  
 By buzzing emissaries fills the ears, 210  
 Of listening crowds with jealousies and fears  
 Of arbitrary counsels brought to light,  
 And proves the King himself a Jebusite.  
 Weak arguments! which yet he knew full well  
 were strong with people easy to reble.  
 For governed by the moon, the giddy Jews  
 Tread the same track when she the prime ranews:  
 And once in twenty years their scribes record,  
 By natural instinct they change their lord.  
 Achutophel still wants a chief, and none 220  
 Was found so fit as warlike Absalon.  
 Not that he wished his greatness to create,  
 For politicians neither love nor hate:  
 But, for he knew his title not allowed.  
 Would keep him still depending on the crowd,  
 That kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be  
 Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.  
 Him he attempts with studied arts to please  
 And sheds his venom in such words as the e: -

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*Disdained* : hated : *contrived* : managed ; *circumstances*  
 occasions ; *giddy* : haughty ; *Dregs* : pulls down ; *venom*  
 poison.

Achitophel (= Earl of Shaftesbury), grown weary to possess a legal fame and lazy happiness, hated to be subordinate to the crown. He took the opposition—group and tried to run down the happiness of Charles II. Now clearly convicted of the crime, he stood against Charles II. The Cabal took the same sudden turn with the King. Shaftesbury observed that the prince who forsook himself deserved to be forsaken. He then put himself at the head of the opposition to the court. Shaftesbury as the leader of the opposition championed vigorously the popular cause. Shaftesbury was falsely blamed for the Popish Plot. The Whigs patronised and encouraged Oates. Shaftesbury was aware of the plot but he never tried to solve the problem. We cannot charge Shaftesbury definitely of 'making circumstances' of the alleged Popish plot but it is certain that he made use of it.

Charles II was in some confidential quarters known to have declared himself a Roman Catholic in 1669. Shaftesbury invented no calumny. He only told the truth. Shaftesbury knew fully well that the arguments were weak but they had great vigour in arousing the general public. The Whigs wished a change of the government. Dryden refers to the English demands for a change of government at intervals of about nineteen years: the Long Parliament, the Restoration, and the troubles of 1679-81. Shaftesbury wanted some one to assist and there was none as worthy as Absalom (= the Duke of Monmouth) had been.

[The Exclusionists encouraged the belief that Monmouth was legitimate, and so the rightful heir to the throne, in the face of Charles's formal denial in 1679 that he had been married to Monmouth's mother.]

Shaftesbury pleaded the case of Monmouth not because he wanted to elevate Monmouth's position but because of his ambition. Dryden represents Shaftesbury as a pure demagogue. Politicians neither love anybody nor hate, they have only their own axe to grind. Shaftesbury knew that Monmouth, without a full and legitimate title to the crown, would for that reason always be dependent on popular support. Shaftesbury tried to poison the feelings of Monmouth and delivered his famous speech to bring Monmouth to his side.

## ACHITOPHEL'S SPEECH

"Auspicious prince, at whose nativity 230  
 "Some royal planet ruled the southern sky,  
 "Thy longing country's darling and desire,  
 "Their cloudy pillar and their guardian fire,  
 "Their second Moses, whose extended wand  
 "Divides the seas and shows the promised land,  
 "Whose dawning day in every distant age  
 "Has exercised the sacred prophet's rage,  
 "The people's prayer, the glad diviner's theme,  
 "The young men's vision, and the old men's dream,  
 "Thee saviour, thee the nation's vows confess, 240  
 "And never satisfied with seeing bless:  
 "Swift unbespoken pomps thy steps proclaim,  
 "And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.  
 "How long wilt thou the general joy detain,  
 "Starve and defraud the people of thy reign ?  
 "Content ingloriously to pass the days,  
 "Like one of the virtue's fools that feeds on praise;  
 "Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,  
 "Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.  
 "Believe me, youth, thy fruit must be 250  
 "Or gathered ripe, or rot upon the tree.  
 "Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late,  
 "Some lucky revolution of their fate;  
 "Whose motions if we watch and guide with skill,  
 "(For human good depends on human will,)  
 "Our fortune rolls as from a smooth descent  
 "And from the first impression takes the bent;  
 "But, if unseized, she glides away like wind  
 "And leaves repenting folly far behind.

*Auspicious* : graceful ; *darling* : dear ; *theme* : subject ;  
*proclaim* : announce ; *defraud* : treason ; *glides* : moves on

## PARAPHRASE

**Achitophel's Speech**

[This famous speech is the Great Temptation scene.  
 Mark Van Doren pronounced that Dryden led the grand  
 rhetorical march of English Poetry. There is a parallel between

Achitophel's seduction of Absalom and Satan's temptation of Eve.] Dryden may have known that Shaftesbury and Monmouth shared an interest in astrology. The constellation seen at mid-day on Charles II's birthday was popularly taken as an omen of high undertakings and.....no common glory.' Achitophel invents a similar omen for Absalom. "Oh lucky prince, when you were born, some royal planet ruled the southern sky. People admired your birth. They thought that their pillar of greatness and their guardian full of vigour has now come to assist them. You are to them a second Moses who divided the sea into two and made a land for the Israelites to be safe from danger. You are possessed of the power of a prophet. You have given them a heavenly theme; you are the vision of the young and dream of the old. You are the saviour of mankind. You are the promise of the land. You are always ambitious to be more and more great. People love you, respect you and desire you to be their king.

A tumultuous welcome was accorded to the Duke of Monmouth when he returned to England in 1679. Shaftesbury was a shrewd politician. Here he is slowly injecting Monmouth the seeds of ambition.

"Your steps proclaim that you will attain great height. Even young babes are taught to utter 'Monmouth'. Your name has become the general out-cry of the land. How long will you remain sitting idle. It is not expected of you to let the general public die of starvation and of a good reign. How long will you remain contented with your idle-attitude. Fools are satisfied with their praise but you are very wise. Do you wish that we should wait and wait and your glory should grow pale and inauspicious. You should believe me, the fruit of your glory must either be ripe on the tree or be rotten down. Heaven has allotted lucky moments for every one, either take the opportunity or let it go to the dogs.

[Dryden takes his images of fortune from the emblem books still popular in his day. It is sometimes represented as a winged ball; often as a goddess on a rolling sphere, bald behind but with her locks streaming before her to be grasped by the opportunists.]



"Now, now she meets you with a glorious prize 260  
 "And spreads her locks before her as she flies.  
 "Had thus old David, from whose loins you spring,  
 "Not dared, when Fortune called him to be King,  
 "At Gath an exile he might still remain,  
 "And Heaven's anointing oil had been in vain.  
 "Let his successful youth your hopes engage,  
 "But shun the example of declining age  
 "Behold him setting in his western skies,  
 "The shadows lengthening as the vapours rise;  
 "He is not now, as when, on Jordan's sand, 270  
 "The joyful people thronged to see him land,  
 "Covering the beach and blackening all the strand  
 "But like the prince of Angels, from his height  
 "Comes tumbling downward with diminished light:  
 "Betrayed by one poor Plot to public scorn,  
 "(Our only blessing since his curst return,)  
 "Those heaps of people, which one sheaf did bind,  
 "Blown off and scattered by a puff of wind.  
 "What strength can he to your designs oppose,  
 "Naked of friends, and round beset with foes? 280  
 "If Pharaoh's doubtful succour he should use,  
 "A foreign aid would more incense the Jews;  
 "Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring,  
 "Foment the war, but not support the King:  
 "Nor would the royal party e'er unite  
 "With Pharaoh's arms to assist the Jebusite:  
 "Or, if they should, their interest soon would break  
 "And with such odious aid make David weak.  
 "All sorts of men, by my successful arts  
 "Abhorring kings, estrange their altered hearts 290  
 "From David's rule: and 'tis the general cry,  
 "Religion, commonwealth, and liberty.

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*Anointing* : smothering ; *thronged* : crowded ; *declining* : going down ; *Naked of* : devoid of ; *dissembled* : false

#### PARAPHRASE

You should grasp the opportunity by the fore-lock. You should remember that human good depends on human will. Our fortune is like a rolling stone. The first impression is the lasting impression. You should remember—

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
When taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life,  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

Now, it is the time, fortune is at your door do not miss the opportunity. Your father Charles II (= David) at first missed the opportunity. You are the child of Charles II and Lucy Walters. He might have remained in Brussels (= Gath) throughout his life, and God's favour would have been lost but he availed of the opportunity and had a grand reception at Dover Beach. Do not wait for his old age. He is like a setting son. Now he is devoid of his previous vigour. In the evening the shadow of a tree is lengthened. Now it is merely the shadow of his youth and nothing else. He does not possess the same charm as he had been possessed of at Dover Beach.

At that time people thronged to greet him then he looked like the Prince of Angels and now he is like a Satan falling from the Heaven and tumbling in Hell.

The Popish Plot is against him. He will shortly be dethroned. We wish to see you king. We wish that the majority of the people which is with you should not be blown like faded leaves but a gust of wind.

[Shaftesbury draws a parallel between Charles II, who in the opinion of the Whigs sought arbitrary power, and Lucifer, who said in his heart, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.' The parallel is ironic; Dryden is portraying Achitophel himself as an aspirant and tempter.]

Now Charles II has no friend; he is surrounded by his enemies. If he uses Pharaoh's (Louis XIV of France) help, the foreign aid will enrage the Britishers. France (= Proud Egypt) will create great mishaps. The Londoners will stand against him and will never take side of Louis XIV's help for the good of the Roman Catholics. If the party welcomes the union, it will more weaken the position of Charles II (= David). All the people will leave the king's party. Their heart will transfer love from Charles II to some other side. The general cry is, "Religion, commonwealth, and liberty."

"If you, as champion of the public good,  
 "Add to their arms a chief of royal blood,  
 "What may not Israel hope, and what applause.  
 "Might such a general gain by such a cause ?  
 "Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flower,  
 "Fair only to the sight, but solid power;  
 "And nobler is a limited command,  
 "Given by the love of all your native land, 300  
 "Than a successive title, long and dark,  
 "Drawn from the mouldy rolls of N ah's ark."

## ABSALOM'S REPLY

What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,  
 When flattery soothes and when ambition blinds ?  
 Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,  
 Yet sprung from high is of celestial seed;  
 In God 'tis glory, and when men aspire,  
 'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.  
 The ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,  
 Too full of angel's metal in his frame, 310  
 Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,  
 Made drunk with honour and dabauched with praise.  
 Half loth and half consenting to the ill,  
 For royal blood within him struggled still,  
 He thus replied: "And what pretence have I  
 "To take up arms for public liberty ?  
 "My father governs with unquestioned right,  
 "The faith's defender and mankind's delight,  
 "Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws;  
 "And Heaven by wonders has espoused his cause. 320  
 "Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign ?  
 "Who sues for justice to his throne in vain ?  
 "What millions has he pardoned of his foes  
 "Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose.  
 "Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good,  
 "Inclined to mercy and averse from blood.

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*Champion* : head ; *applause* : praise ; *barren* : not fertile ;  
*ark* : boat ; *ambition* : desire ; *studious* : hardy ; *inclined* : bent  
 towards

If you, as champion of the public good, assist the public—cause, all the ambitions of the Great Britain will be accomplished. You will be praised highly. Your praise shall not be barren, it will never be false. It will be fair and solid. Your reign will be noble. Everyone shall bless you. Remember, “He who hath the worst title ever makes the best king .....; that instead of God and my right, his motto may be God and my people.”

### Absalom's Reply

[Dryden shifts the blame on Shaftesbury.] Dryden comments that people are generally led astray when they are flattered and when they become over-ambitious. It is vile to have a desire of power on earth. It is noble to have been born of a high status of society. To have the desire of power is fit in case of God but it is never befitting in case of human beings. The ambitious man, craving for fame, possessing of strength, is generally led astray and he is ruined. The ambitious man is envenomed by the false praise. He is led away from virtue. He is half willing and half-unwilling to tread on the path of evil. The Duke of Monmouth had the royal blood in his veins, so he said to Shaftesbury, “Why for should I take arms against Charles II? My father rules England very nobly. He is the Defender of the faith. He is the delight of the public. He is noble, grand, just and the observer of the law. God has married him to good cause. He has done no harm to anybody. Every body seeks justice from him. He has pardoned his innumerable foes. He had never been out of temper. He is mild, easy, humble and is concerned with public good. He is always inclined to mercy and is opposite of shedding blood.”

"If mildness ill with stubborn Israel suit,  
 "His crime is God's beloved attribute.  
 "What could he gain his people to betray  
 "Or change his right for arbitrary sway ? 330  
 "Let haughty Pharaoh curse with such a reign  
 "His fruitful Nile, and yoke a servile train.  
 "If David's rule Jerusalem displease,  
 "The dog-star heats their brains to this disease  
 "Why then should I, encouraging the bad,  
 "Turn rebel and run popularly mad ?  
 "Were he a tyrant, who by lawless might  
 "Oppressed the Jews and raised the Jebusite,  
 "Well might I mourn; but nature's holy bands  
 "Would curb my spirits and restrain my hands; 340  
 "The people might assert their liberty,  
 "But what was right in them were crime in me.  
 "His favour leaves me nothing to require,  
 "Prevent my wishes and outruns desire;  
 "What more can I expect while David lives ?  
 "All but his kingly diadem he gives:  
 And that" --But there he paused, then sighing said,  
 Is justly destined for a worthier head:  
 For when my father from his toils shall rest  
 "And late augment the number of the blest, 350  
 "His lawful issue shall the throne ascend,  
 "Or the collateral line, where that shall end.  
 "His brother, though oppressed with vulgar spite,  
 "Yet dauntless and secure of native right,  
 "Of every royal virtue stands possess,  
 "Still dear to all the bravest and the best.  
 "His courage foes, his friends his truth proclaim,  
 "His loyalty the King, the world his fame.  
 "His mercy even the offending crowd will find,  
 "For sure he comes of a forgiving kind. 360

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*mildness* : humility ; *attribute* : gift ; *sway* : motion ;  
*restrain* : check ; *toils* : labour ; *oppressed* : troubled ; *offending* :  
 troubling.

God is merciful. Charles's mercy is no crime. God's beloved attribute is mercy. His mercy is, therefore, no crime. He will gain nothing by betraying the public. Charles II said in the Oxford Parliament in 1681, "I, who will never use arbitrary Government myself, am resolved not to suffer it in others. It is as much my interest as yours, to preserve the liberty of the subject, because the crown can never be safe when that is in danger."

Let haughty Louis XIV of France curse such a nice reign of Charles II, let him be proud of France (= Nile), and Yoke a train of slaves. If the people of London are against the reign of Charles II, I think they have become mad under the effect of Sirius (which was thought to cause great heat on the earth).

I do not see any reason to encourage the bad, to turn rebel and be mad after popularity. Has he ever been a tyrant? Has he ever oppressed the jews and has he ever raised the Papists? He has been always just and merciful. If he has ever been unmerciful, I would lament. My duty towards my father urges me to be loyal to him. People may crave for liberty but in my case it will be a crime, if I let loose myself against him. He has been always favourable towards me and there remains nothing to ask for. My wishes and desires are all satisfied. There remains nothing to seek so long as my father is alive. He has given me everything except his ensign of royalty and that is enough. So saying Monmouth paused for a while.

"Why should I then rapine at Heaven's decree.  
 "Which gives me no pretence to royalty ?  
 "Yet oh that Fate, propitiously inclined,  
 "Had raised my birth or had debased my mind,  
 "To my large soul not all her treasure lent.  
 "And then betrayed it to a mean descent !  
 "I find, I find my mounting spirits bold,  
 "And David's part disdains my mother's mould.  
 "Why am I scanted by a niggard birth ?  
 "My soul disclaims the kindred of her earth; 370  
 "And, made for empire, whispers me within;  
 "Desire of greatness is a god-like sin."

#### ACHITOPHEL'S SECOND SPEECH

Him staggering so when Hell's dire agent found,  
 While fainting virtue scarce maintained her ground,  
 He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies:  
 "The eternal God, supremely good and wise,  
 "Imparts not these prodigious gifts in vain.  
 "What wonders are reserved to bless your reign !  
 "Against your will your arguments have shown,  
 "Such virtue's only given to guide a throne. 380

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*Betrayed* : deceived ; *disdains* : hates ; *niggard* : illegitimate ;  
*staggering* : about to falling down ; *scarce* : rarely ; *prodigious* :  
 great.

Whatever my father has done to me is worthier for the head of a family. When he is dead, his lawful issue shall ascend the throne, or if there is none, some other person of the same stock but of different line shall be the ruler of the state. His brother, James. Duke of York, is already the lawful heir to the throne, why should I unnecessarily contend for it? He is courageous. He has the right of succession. He is possessed of the royal virtue. He is royal to the king.

Fate has inclined him the future heir to the throne. I have a wide heart. I owe every thing to Charles II. I shall never betray him. I realise my bold spirit but it should be remembered that I am illegitimate child. My soul disclaims my birth. Sometimes I aspire to be the heir--apparent and at others I think, "Desire of greatness is a god-like sin".

[Absalom clinches the argument with a neat and bold assertion. He speaks, as it were, with a clean conscience.]

### **Achitophel's Second Speech.**

Shaftesbury is pictured here as Satan. This evil genius found the Duke of Monmouth in a vacillating situation. [This is one of the epic devices of sentence--construction, which Dryden makes use of. There is a struggle going on between Virtue and Temptation; and Monmouth fell a victim to the latter.] Marking the vacillating situation of Monmouth, Achitophel (=Shaftesbury) makes further persuasion. He says, "The eternal God, supremely good and wise, imparts not these enormous gifts in vain. You do not know what wonders are hidden when you become king. Your arguments are against your will. You are a virtuous fellow and virtues as these are fit to be crowned.



"Not that your father's mildness I condemn,  
 "But manly force becomes the diadem  
 "'Tis true he grants the people all they crave;  
 "And more perhaps than subjects ought to have:  
 "For lavish grants suppose a monarch tame  
 "And more his goodness than his wit proclaim.  
 "But when should people strive their bonds to break,  
 "If not when kings are negligent or weak ?  
 "Let him give on till he can give no more,  
 "The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor; 390  
 "And every shekel which he can receive  
 "Shall cost a limb of his prerogative,  
 "To ply him with new plots shall be my care,  
 "Or plunge him deep in some expensive war;  
 "Which when his treasure can no more supply,  
 "He must with the remains of kingship buy  
 "His faithful friends our jealousies and fears  
 "Call Jebusites and Pharaoh's pensioners,  
 "Whom when our fury from his aid has torn,  
 "He shall be nacked left to public scorn. 400  
 "The next successor, whom I fear and hate,  
 "My arts have made obnoxious to the State,  
 "Turned all his virtues to his overthrow,  
 "And gained our elders to pronounce a foe.  
 "His right for sums of necessary gold  
 "Shall first be pawned, and afterwards be sold;  
 "Till time shall ever-wanting David draw  
 "To pass your doubtful title into law.  
 "If not, the people have a right supreme  
 "To make their kings, for kings are made for them. 410

*Contemn* : to scorn ; *diadem* : crown ; *crave* : desire ; *negli-*  
*gent* : careless ; *prerogative* : right ; *Pharaoh* : Louis XIV of France;  
*obnoxious* : hateful ; *Pawned* : mortgaged.

"Do not think that I scornfully regard the mildness of your father but it should be remembered that manly force is fit to become a king. It is true that he grants people what they desire and perhaps he does more good than subjects do enjoy. When favours are done in abundance, it proves that the monarch has some flaws in him. He has more of the goodness than the wit. People break the bonds of loyalty when they find that their king has become careless and weak.

"Let him spend excessively. The time will come when the Parliament will not grant him anything. Every coin which he will receive shall demand a limb of his right. When he runs out of money he must pay for the war by selling the remnants of his independence to the French king. His faithful friends with jealousy towards us call the Roman Catholics and Louis XIV of France as only pensioners. When we are turned against him, he will meet his cruel fate and no body shall honour him.

The next successor (=James II) is unworthy for the crown. I hate him and I am afraid if he becomes king. My arts have made him hateful. [It refers to Shaftesbury's intrigues for passing the Exclusion Bill.] Shaftesbury had persuaded the House of Commons to accept his proposal for the Exclusion of the Catholic Duke of York from the throne.

James II has been pronounced a foe. His right as a successor to the throne shall carry no weight. Your father will become aware of it. He will also not like to proclaim him his successor and then he will be obliged to make you the legal heir apparent. If the king Charles II does not assert your title to the throne, then the people have right to make kings of their own.

"All empire is no more than power in trust,  
 "Which, when resumed, can be no longer just.  
 "Succession, for the general good designed,  
 "In its own wrong a nation cannot bind:  
 "If altering that the people can relieve,  
 "Better one suffer than a nation grieve.  
 "The Jews well know their power; ere Saul they chose  
 "God was their King, and God they durst depose.  
 "Urge now your piety, your filial name,  
 "A father's right and fear of future fame, 420  
 "The public good, that universal call,  
 "To which even Heaven submitted, answers all,  
 "Nor let his love enchant your generous mind :  
 "Tis Nature's trick to propagate her kind.  
 "Our fond begetters, who would never die,  
 "Love but themselves in their posterity.  
 "Or let his kindness by the effects be tried  
 "Or let him lay his vain pretence aside.  
 "God said, He loved your father ; could He bring  
 "A better proof than to anoint him King ? 430  
 "It surely showed, He loved the shepherd well  
 "Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.  
 "Would David have you thought his darling son ?  
 "What means he then to alienate the crown ?  
 "The name of godly he may blush to bear;  
 "'Tis after God's own heart to cheat his heir.  
 "He to his brother gives supreme command,  
 "To you a legacy of barren land,  
 "Perhaps the old harp on which he thrums his lays  
 "Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise. 440

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*Resumed* : undertaken ; *altering* : changing ; *relieve* : to do away with ; *Saul* : Cromwell ; *durst* : dared ; *propagate* : to declare ; *begetters* : claimants ; *posterity* : for ever ; *shepherd* : Christ ; *alienate* : to transfer ; *barren land* : refer to the parphrase.

All executive authority is no more than power in trust. When the trust is gone, the power is lost. Succession to the throne is always designed by the general public. The nation cannot be bound by wrongful ties. If by the change, a man suffers, let him suffer, the whole nation should not be made to mourn. The republicans acknowledged God alone as their king, but they were dispossessed by Cromwell.

You should urge your affection—your loyalty to your father, and fear of future forms. The public good, the universal call, urges you to take the right course. Even God has to submit himself before the general good.

Now, the affection of Charles II should not enchant you. It is Nature's trick to prompt us to make avail of the opportunity.

Shaftesbury gradually convinces Monmouth. Our foolish Old people sometimes thought that they would never die but the course of truth does never run smooth.

Dryden makes Achitophal assert it to be 'after god's own heart to cheat his heir', *i.e.* to deprive the Duke of York of his succession. Let the kindness of Charles be tested, it is all camouflage, let him lay his pretences aside, then it will be known how far he is justifiable.

God said that He loved Charles II, and He made him King of England. There can be no other mercy of God to him. It is evident that He loved Charles II (=shepherd) well and hence He gave him England (=a Flock as Israel) to rule. Now, has Charles II ever thought you to be the legitimate heir to the throne? Are You not his son? What reason lies there to deprive you of the crown?

Charles II is called goodly of temper, but now he will be ashamed to bear this title. He must deprive the Duke of York of his succession. He gives James, Duke of York, his brother the supreme command and to you he gives a legacy of unfertile land (=probably the Border estates of Monmouth's wife).

Charles II, like David, was a lover of music, what remains of his poetry is as undistinguished as Achitophel implies. He plays on the same old harp and sings some Hebrew ballad in your praise which is good for nothing to you.

"Then the next heir, a prince severe and wise,  
 "Already looks on you with jealous eyes,  
 "See through the thin disguises of your arts,  
 "And marks your progress in the people's hearts;  
 "Though now his mighty soul its grief contains,  
 "He meditates revenge who least complains;  
 "And like a lion, slumbering in the way  
 "Or sleep dissembling while he waits his prey,  
 "His fearless foes within his distance draws,  
 "Constrains his roaring and contracts his paws, 450  
 "Till at the last, his time for fury found,  
 "He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground,  
 "The prostate vulgar passes o'er and spares,  
 "But with a lordly rage his hunters tears :  
 "Your case no tame expedients will afford,  
 "Resolve on death or conquest by the sword,  
 "Which for no less a stake than life you draw,  
 "And self-defence is Nature's eldest law.  
 "Leave the warm people no considering time,  
 "For the rebellion may be thought a crime. 460  
 "Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,  
 "But try your title while your father lives;  
 "And, that your arms may have a fair pretence,  
 "Proclaim you take them in the King's defence;  
 "Whose sacred life each minute would expose  
 "To plots from seeming friends and secret foes,  
 "And who can sound the depth of David's soul ?  
 "Perhaps his fear his kindness may control;  
 "He fears his brother, though he loves his son,  
 "For plighted vows too late to be undone. 470

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*Severe* : hard ; *slumbering* : sleeping ; *dissembling* : pretend-  
 ing ; *fury* : rage ; *prevail yourself* : gird of your loins ; *plighted* :  
 troubled, agitated.

You are wise and severe, you are fit to be his heir but James, Duke of York, is jealous of you. He has a penetrating eyes, he recognises your strength and knows that you have captivated the heart of general public. He is much grieved; he seeks occasion to take revenge on you. James pretends to be sleeping on the way like a lion who is awaiting for his prey. [James is very insincere. He wishes to deprive you of the successorship.]

Now, he is devoid of his strength. His foes are thronging against him and are after beating him down. The time is at hand, when he will be over enraged and will become a prey of his foes. He will be like a prostrate vulgar devoid of all grace and strength. [an ancient belief derived from Pliny.]

Your case is different. No tame devices can dethrone you. Either you should die an ignoble death or gird up your loins. To have conquest by the sword is a noble thing. Stake yourself to gain honour and reputation. Self-defence is the law of Nature. Your life is at stake, you must defend your self.

Do not give opportunity for reflection. This is the right time, later on rebellion may be supposed as a crime but now it is your right to stand against Charles II and James. Take advantage of the time! You ought to test your strength. [Shaftesbury is goading Monmouth to seize the opportunity by the forelock]. At present your father is alive, put before the public what you are capable of. Your taking up arms against him may crown you with laurels. Do not hesitate. It is possible, he may assert you his heir-apparent. His life is also in danger and very soon his follies will be exposed. His friends are all false and secret foes are after him. There is none to assist him or defend him except you. He is kind but he is afraid of James. Probably his kindness may be subjugated by his fearfulness.

Charles fears to go back upon his earlier pronouncements on the question of succession. In his heart of hearts Charles wants Monmouth to succeed him. [This is how Earl of Shaftesbury makes use of his argumentative powers to tilt the scales and trap Monmouth.]

"If so, by force he wishes to be gained,  
 "Like women's lechery to seem constrained.  
 "Doubt not ; but, when he most affects the frown,  
 "Commit a pleasing rape upon the crown.  
 "Secure his person to secure your cause :  
 "They, who possess the Prince, possess the laws."

### ABSALOM YIELDS TO ACHITOPHEL

He said, and this advice above the rest  
 With Absalom's mild nature suited best ;  
 Unblamed of life (ambition set aside),  
 Not stained with cruelty nor puffed with pride,      430  
 How happy had he been, if Destiny  
 Had higher placed his birth or not so high !  
 His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne  
 And blessed all other countries but his own ;  
 But charming greatness since so few refuse,  
 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse.  
 Strong were his hopes a rival to remove,  
 With blandishments to gain the public love,  
 To head the faction while their zeal was hot,  
 And popularly prosecuted the plot.      490

### ACHITOPHEL'S FOLLOWERS

To further this, Achitophel unites  
 The malcontents of all the Israelites,  
 Whose differing parties he could wisely join  
 For several ends to serve the same design ;  
 The best, (and of the princes some were such,)  
 Who thought the power of monarchy too much ;  
 Mistaken men and patriots in their hearts,  
 Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts ;  
 By these the springs of property were bent  
 And wound so high they cracked the government.      500

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*lechery* : fraud ; *constrained* : forced ; *frown* : anger ;  
 \* *stained* : polluted ; *blandishments* : softnesses ; *Israelites* : Londners  
*Cracked* : ruined.

Just as women, while pretending to frown, inwardly welcome a lover's attentions, so also Charles while pretending to be loyal to James, really wants Monmouth to ascend the throne. In order to secure your cause, you must defend Charles, you must assist him. The man, who possesses the Prince, possesses the laws. [Law grinds the poor and elevates them who make the laws.]

### **Absalom yields to Achitophel**

Absalom heard all that Shaftesbury had said and yielded to him. [Dryden is treating Monmouth with great tenderness throughout.] Monmouth set aside his ambition. His life was blotless. It was free from cruelty or pride. He would have been very happy had he been blessed of legitimate birth. His kingly virtues must have claimed a throne and blessed all other countries except his own. Monmouth had a charming appearance and greatness, none can doubt this and if he failed in his attempts he is not to be accused of. We are only to lament. His hopes were strong and he could have defeated any rival and would have attained the public love. He could be the head of the opposition group while the public zeal was at its zenith and he would have been able to bring about the plot with success but his plans could not mature.

### **Achitophel's Followers**

To gain success in his plot, he united the various factions which were dissatisfied with Charles. He gathered them, he joined them to make Monmouth the legal heir—apparent.

There were some—the best of the princes—who believed in the principle of monarchy. They were in the wrong but in the core of their heart, they were patriots. They were not wicked but were generally tempted by evil arts to gain high position. The government was thronged by them and it seemed they had uprooted the strength of the state.



The next for interest sought to embroil the state  
 To sell their duty at a dearer rate,  
 And make their Jewish markets of the throne ;  
 Pretending public good to serve their own.  
 Others thought kings an useless heavy load,  
 Who cost too much and did too little good.  
 These were for laying honest David by  
 On principles of pure good husbandry  
 With them joined all the haranguers of the throng  
 That thought to get preferment by the tongue. 510  
 Who follow next a double danger bring,  
 Not only hating David, but the King ;  
 The Solymaeen rout, well versed of old  
 In godly faction and in treason bold,  
 Cowering and quaking at a conqueror's sword,  
 But lofty to a lawful prince restored,  
 Saw with disdain an Ethnic plot begun  
 And scorned by Jebusites to be outdone.  
 Hot Levites headed these ; who pulled before  
 From the ark, which in the Judges' days they bore, 520  
 Resumed their cant, and with a zealous cry  
 Pursued their old beloved theocracy,  
 Where Sanhedrin and priest enslaved the nation  
 And justified their spoils by inspiration ;  
 For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race,  
 If once dominion they could found in grace ?  
 These led the pack ; though not of surest scent,  
 Yet deep-st mouthed against the government.  
 A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed  
 Of the true old enthusiastic breed : 530

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*Sought* : searched ; *to embroil* : to agitate ; *pretending* :  
 making false show ; *husbandry* : management ; *Cowering* :  
 lowing down with fear ; *quacking* : trembling ; *disdain* : hate ;  
*Ethnic plot* : Popis Plot ; *theocracy* : refer to the paraphrase.

Others wanted to involve the state in a Civil war to gain honour, power and pelf. They wished to have their hold on the state. They pretended to be doing good to the public but really they had only their axe to grind.

There were others who thought that kings were good for nothing. It is an unnecessary wastage of money to have kings. These people were not only opposed to monarchy but also opposed to David (= Charles II). The mob orators of London also joined them, who wished to be given preference simply because they could address the public very skilfully.

Some others also came. They hated not merely Charles personally, but the very institution of monarchy. The mob of London could be compared to the mob of Jerusalem, who had been very quarrelsome in point of religion and very bold in treachery, shrinking in fear and trembling in face of a conqueror.

It is strange that Charles II was a legal prince and very noble, even then the Popish Plot of Titus Oates began against him. He was disdained by the Papists who wished to dethrone him. The dissenting ministers deprived of their benefices by the Act of Uniformity 1662 headed these persons. They were the Presbyterian priests. They had their hypocritical speech, technical jargon and wished the government by God. [= N. B. Dominion is founded in Grace: not Nature. That the goods of this world are properly the Elect's.]

The dissenters had their own doctrine. They believed that the Parliament and priests enslaved the nation and justified their ruins by inspiration. Dryden comments here that none is as fit as the race of clergy who could never find any grace in any government.

These, above mentioned people, led the mob, though not of sound policy. They bayed most loudly against the government. A numerous host of such false clergy-men comes to light standing against the form and order even which they employ. They do nothing constructive but are always destructive.

'Gainst form and order they their power employ,  
 Nothing to build and all things to destroy.  
 But far more numerous was the herd of such  
 Who think too little and who talk too much.  
 These out of mere instinct, they knew not why,  
 Adored their fathers' God and property,  
 And by the same blind benefit of Fate  
 The Devil and the Jebusite did hate :  
 Born to be saved, even in their own despite,  
 Because they could not help believing right.  
 Such were the tools ; but a whole hydra more  
 Remains of sprouting heads too long to score.  
 Some of their chiefs were princes of the land ;

540

## ZIMRI

In the first rank of these Zimri stand,  
 A man so various that he seemed to be  
 Not one, but all mankind's epitome ;  
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
 Was everything by starts and nothing long ;  
 But in the course of one revolving moon  
 Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon ;  
 Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,  
 Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.  
 Blest madman, who could every hour employ  
 With something new to wish or to enjoy !  
 Railing and praising were his usual themes,  
 And both, to show his judgment, in extremes :  
 So over violent or over civil  
 That every man with him was God or Devil.

550

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*Adored* : worshipped ; *Jebusites* : Roman Catholic ; *despite* malice ; *hydra* : a huge monster with many heads ; *sprouting* springing up ; *epitome* : summary ; *Chymist* : alchemist ; *railing* abusing.

There were many others who had been simply boastful and talkative doing no good to society. No body knows why they worshipped their fathers' God and property. It should be remembered that many of the Whigs were landed gentry, merchants, and wealthy dissenters, upholding the principles of religious toleration and the sanctity of private property.

No one can say why these dissenters hated Charles II and the Papists. They were born to be saved even in their scorn because they could not believe the truth. Such parties were engaged by Earl of Shaftesbury. There were many more springing now and then like the springing up the heads of a huge monster called Hydra (= a huge monster with many heads). Enough to describe them all, some of them had been great ones, the chiefs, the princes of the land.

### Zimri

Zimri stands for George Villiers (1628-87), second Duke of Buckingham. Zimri stand first. He was a man of so many ambitions that he seemed not one but the epitome of all mankind. He was haughty in his opinion but always in the wrong. He could become an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman and a buffoon. He had great liveliness of wit and a peculiar faculty turning all things into ridicule. He had no principles of religion, virtue or friendship. Pleasure, frolick, or extravagant diversion was all that he laid to heart. He was true to nothing for he was not true to himself. He had no steadiness nor conduct. He could never fix his thoughts, nor govern his estate.

He was such in excess that the man whom he accompanied sometimes appeared to be God and at others a devil. He laughs himself from Court. Referring to this line Churton Collins observes, "A reference to Buckingham's foolish plot against the King in 1667, in consequence of which he was obliged to cancel himself; but afterwards surrendering he was confined to the Tower, till the King moved by the mingled threats and entreaties of the Duchess of Cleveland, set him free".

In squandering wealth was his peculiar art ;  
 Nothing went unrewarded but desert, 560  
 Beggared by fools whom still he found too late,  
 He had his jest, and they had his estate.  
 He laughed himself from Court; then sought relief  
 By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief  
 For spite of him, the weight of business fell  
 On Absalom and wise Achitophel;  
 Thus wicked but in will, of means bereft,  
 He left not faction, but of that was left.

### OTHER REBEL LEADERS

Titles and names, 'tween tedious to rehearse  
 Of lords below the dignity of verse. 570  
 Wits, warriors, commonwealth's men were the best;  
 Kind husbands and mere nobles all the rest.  
 And therefore in the name of dulness be  
 The well-hung Balaam and cold Caleb free;  
 And canting Nadab let oblivion damn  
 Who made new porridge for the paschal lamb.  
 Let friendship's holy band some names assure,  
 Some their own worth, and some let scorn secure.  
 Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place  
 Whom kings no titles gave, and God no grace; 580  
 Not bull-faced Jonas, who could statutes draw  
 To mean rebellion and make treason law.

### SHIMEI

But he, though bad is followed by a worse,  
 The wretch who Heaven's anointed dared to curse;  
 Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring  
 Of zeal to God and hatred to his king,  
 Did wisely from expensive sins refrain  
 And never broke the Sabbath but for gain :  
 Nor ever was he known an oath to vent  
 Or curse, unless against the government. 590

*Squandering* : wasting ; *peculiar* : strange ; *beggared* : made beggar ; *jest* : joke ; *faction* : tumult ; *Balaam, caleb* : refer to paraphrase ; *refrain* : to leave ; *expensive* : costly ; *Sabbath* : Sunday.

Zimri was released, no doubt, afterwards but he could never become the chief. Absalom and Achitophel had to look towards his business. Thus Zimri was wicked but he had no means to show his wickedness. His state was the greatest of all in England but in spite of it, he was unsteady and characterless.

### Other Rebel Leaders

It is of no use to take the names of all the rebel leaders. They were rather wits, warriors and the best of the Commonwealth's men. They had been rather kind husbands and noble men. Among them Balaam and Caleb were fluent and licentious. [Balaam is probably either Theophilus Hastings, seventh Earl of Huntington, or Sir Francis Widdington. Caleb is probably Arthur Capel, Earl of Essex, viceroy in Ireland, an Exclusionist, and a 'sober, wise, judicious, and pondering person' or Ford, Lord Grey of Wark.] There was one dissenter, Nadab, William, Lord Howard of Escrick, formerly a sectarian preacher, and a railer at king and Church. He was sent to the Tower in March 1681 on a charge of libelling Charles, and is said there to have taken the sacrament according to the Book of Common Prayer, using lam's wool—a hot ale mixed with apple pulp—for wine. It was Nadab who made new hotchpotch, applied by dissenters to the Anglican services and prayer-book. Let friendship's holy band assure some names. Let some of them be secured of their worth and let others be secured of hate. The vague London—mob shall have no place here, Charles II gave them no titles and God also did not confer upon them any grace. The evil tempered Jonas (=William Jones, the Attorney-General who conducted the prosecutions of the Popish Plot) became an Exclusionist later on. He prosecuted the mean rebellion at first.

### Shimei

[Shimei—Slingsby Bethel (1617-97) was elected one of London's two Whig sheriffs in 1680. He had been a republican, and his election was contrived to pack juries with party-men. He lived meanly as sheriff which was very unacceptable to the body of the citizens, and proved a great prejudice to the party] William Jones was a bad one but he was followed by a worse, the wretch who cursed the King. His name was

Thus heaping wealth by the most ready way  
 Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray,  
 The City, to reward his pious hate  
 Against his master, chose him magistrate.  
 His hand a vare of justice did uphold,  
 His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.  
 During his Office treason was no crime,  
 The sons of Belial had a glorious time ;  
 For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,  
 Yet, loved his wicked neighbour as himself, 600  
 When two or three were gathered to declaim  
 Against the monarch of Jerusalem,  
 Shimei was always in the midst of them :  
 And, if they cursed the King when he was by,  
 Would rather curse than break good company.  
 If any durst his factious friends accuse,  
 He packed a jury of dissenting Jews ;  
 Whose fellow-feeling in the godly cause  
 Would free the suffering saint from human laws:  
 For laws are only made to punish those 610  
 Who serve the King, and to protect his foes.  
 If any leisure time he had from power,  
 Because 'tis sin to misemploy an hour,  
 His business was by writing to persuade  
 That kings were useless and a clog to trade :  
 And that his noble style he might refine,  
 No Rechabite more sunned the fumes of wine.  
 Chaste were his cellars, and his shrieval board  
 The grossness of a city feast abhorred :  
 His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot ; 620

*heaping*: amassing; *vare*: staff; *prodigal*: extravagant; *pelf*: wealth;  
*to accuse*: to stand against; *clog*: obstacle; *shunned*: hated;  
*abhorred*: left.

Shimei. In his youth it seemed that he would be a true Christian, a fidel to the Almighty. He had a hatred towards Charles II. He was a notorius republican. Never did he break the Sabbath and if he ever broke it, it was to have some personal gain. He was never known to have broken any oath or cursed any-one except the government of Charles II.

He became very rich by heaping wealth upon wealth like the jews whose daily routines are to deceive and pretend to be religious-minded. The city elected him a magistrate as it were to reward him for his keeping hate towards the King. He had a wand or staff of justice in his hand, he wore gold chain around his neck. *Ironical*—During his office, treason was not taken to be a crime. Drunkenness and immorality reigned there.

Shimei, although not extravagant of his wealth, loved his wicked neighbours like himself. When two or three persons gathered to declaim the King, he was always there. He did not leave the company of those wicked persons, even when Charles would happen to come there. He would rather reproach him than to give up their company. If any person raised his head against them, he would rather pack juries with party men. He had a great fellow-feeling towards his wicked companions. It could free the suffering saints from the human laws. He thought, "Laws are made only to punish them who serve the King. They are meant to protect the enemies of the King." If he had any leisure hours with him, he did not like to waste them. He would utilise that time in writing some libel against the King. To him Kings were useless and a nonsensical obstacle. As regards himself he thought him more refined than Rechabite. (=Jonadab, the son of Rechab commanded never to drink wine nor his future generation.)

His cellars were Chaste and his belongings were all rightful. He hated the grossness of a city feast. His cooks forgot the art of cookery as they had never been asked to cook. His kitchen remained cool, although his mind was always alert.



Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.  
 Such frugal virtue malice may accuse,  
 But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews :  
 For towns once burnt such magistrates require  
 As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.  
 With spiritual food he fed his servants well,  
 But free from flesh that made the Jews rebel :  
 And Moses' laws he held in more account  
 For forty days of fasting in the mount.

## CORAH

To speak the rest, who better are forgot, 630  
 Would tire a well-breathed witness of the plot.  
 Yet, Corah, thou shalt from oblivion pass ;  
 Erect thyself, thou monumental brass,  
 High as the serpent of thy metal made,  
 While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.  
 What though his birth were base, yet comets rise  
 From earthly vapours, are they shine in skies.  
 Prodigious actions may as well be done  
 By weaver's issue as by prince's son.  
 This arch-attester for the public good 640  
 By that one deed ennobles all his blood  
 Who ever asked the witness' high race  
 Whose oath with martyrdom did Stephen grace ?  
 Ours was a Levite, and as times went then,  
 His tribe were God Almighty's gentlemen.  
 Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,  
 Sure signs he neither cholerick was nor proud:  
 His long chin proved his wit, his saint-like grace  
 A church vermillion and a Moses' face.

*malice*: ill-will; *tempt*: to seduce; *oblivion*: forgetfulness; *metal serpent*: read the paraphrase; *cholerick*: melancholy; *vermillion*: red.

Such economical virtues may accuse the ill-feelings but surely it was but natural for the doctors of the Church of London. **Satire**—The London fire is a proof that God will not be again seduced to bring His fiery lash. He fed his servants with spiritual food i.e. he always talked of religion but it was always free from doing harm. It could not make the Londoners rebel. He believed in the laws of Moses and fasting for forty days.

### Corah

[Corah stands for Titus Oates (1649-1705), son of a Norfolk weaver turned preacher. He was received in the Roman Church in 1677 and was expelled from the English College at Valladolid. Dryden's satire struck him at the crisis of his fortunes.]

There is no good to describe others. Titus Oates should not be forgotten; he was like a monumental brass serpent made by Moses. [There is an allusion to the serpent of brass made by Moses, and set upon a pole by God's command to save the Israelites from the fiery serpents which God sent for punishment. Dryden may also be recalling the Old Testament application of 'brass' to 'a people impudent in sin'.]

Titus Oates should be brought back from the state of forgetfulness. He was a clergy, although he was a weaver's son. It should be noted that comets rise from the vapours of the earth before they shine brightly in the sky. Great deeds may also be done by a weaver's son as are done by a prince. This arch-attester (Titus Oates), embarrassed by his mean birth, had his pedigree made out. A blazon was engraved on his Table and other Plate, for he was rich, set up for a solemn House-keeper, and lived upto his quality. Titus was a clergy man. He wished to do good to the public. His oaths were as genuine as the oaths of Stephen, the first Martyr, had been.

Titus was a clergyman (=Levite). As time went on his tribe became the tribe of God. Titus was bold and impudent, impatient in discourse, stiff, irrefragable and prodigious in their tenents, and if they be moved, most violent, outrageous, ready to disgrace. Dryden paints him ironically. He had sunken eyes, was harsh in tone; he was neither choleric, nor proud. He had a long chin that proved his wit. He had a saint-like grace. He had the red face of the sensual priest like that of Moses.

His memory, miraculously great, 650  
 Could plots exceeding man's belief repeat ;  
 Which therefore cannot be accounted lies,  
 For human wit could never such devise.  
 Some future truths are mingled in his book,  
 But where the witness failed, the prophet spoke.  
 Some things like visionary flights appear ;  
 The spirit caught him up, the Lord knows where ;  
 And gave him his Rabbinical degree  
 Unknown to foreign University.  
 His judgment yet his memory did excel, 660  
 Which pieced his wondrous evidence so well  
 And suited to the temper of the times,  
 Then groaning under Jebusitic crimes.  
 Let Israel's foes suspect his heavenly call  
 And rashly judge his wit apocryphal ;  
 Our laws for such affronts have forfeits made,  
 He takes his life who takes away his trade.  
 Were I myself witness Corah's place,  
 The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace  
 Should whet my memory, though once forgot, 670  
 To make him an appendix of my plot.  
 His zeal to Heaven made him his Prince despise,  
 And load his person with indignities.  
 But zeal peculiar privilege affords.  
 Indulging latitude to deeds and words :  
 And Corah might for Agag's murder call,  
 In terms as coarse as Samuel used to Saul.  
 What others in his evidence did join,  
 The best that could be had for love or coin.  
 In Corah's own predicament will fall, 680  
 For Witness is a common name to all.

*miraculously*: astonishingly; *devise*: to make a plot; *visionary*:  
 imaginary; *excel*: to be high; *wondrous*: wonderful; *foes*: enemies  
*apocryphal*: religious writings of doubtful authenticity; *affronts*:  
 insults; *indignities*: disgraces; *predicament*: state.

He had a great memorising power. He could repeat the prevailing beliefs of men and exaggerate them to such an amount as could not be thought to be false. Human wit can never devise accounts like him.

Titus has written a book in which may be found many interminglings of truth. Where he failed to express a thing, he would take an aid of the experiences of any prophet whether it might have been or not. His statements appear like the fanciful flights. Oates claimed that while at Valladolid he travelled to Salamanca and was admitted Doctor of Divinity. The Salamanca authorities strenuously denied this.

He had a great oratorical power. It made the hearers believe that Titus was speaking the truth and the Londoners (=Whigs) stood against Charles and took the Popish Plot as real.

Corah did not pay any attention to what others said of him. The foes of London may suspect his divine writings and judge them as fictitious. The English laws have had certain principle. "He takes his life who takes away his trade". It is better to kill a man than to take his livings.

It had become apparant that personal malice underlay many of Oates's accusations. Oates made no direct charges against Charles; but he lived with insulting flamboyance in Whitehall, accused the queen of high treason, and charged her physician with complicity in a plot to poison Charles with her approval. If one dared to question Corah's words, he also was soon sure to be included in Corah's list of traitors.

Peculiar enthusiasm affords peculiar rights. He indulged in words as well as in deeds. Agag refers to sir Edmund Bury Godfrey, the magistrate before whom Oates made his deposition about the Popish Plot. When Godfreg was found murdered soon after the deposition, the rival factions charged each other with the crime.

[N.B. Dryden's own insinuation is that, since Godfrey was inclined to disbelieve Oates, the later secretly did away with the upright magistrate. While according to the Biblical story Samuel merely reproached Saul for sparing Agag, Corah actually brought about Agag's death.]

## ABSALOM'S CAMPAIGN

Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,  
 Deluded Absalom forsakes the court ;  
 Impatient of high hopes, urged with renown.  
 And fired with near possession of a crown.  
 The admiring crowd are dazzled with surprise  
 And on his goodly person feed their eyes.  
 His joy concealed, he sets himself to show,  
 On each side bowing popularly low,  
 His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames 690  
 And with familiar ease repeats their names.  
 Thus formed by nature, furnished out with arts,  
 He glides unfelt into their secret hearts.

## ABSALOM'S SPEECH

Then with a kind compassionating look,  
 And sighs, bespeaking pity ere he spoke,  
 Few words he said, but easy those and fit,  
 More show than Hybla-drops and far more sweet :  
 "I mourn, my countrymen, your lost estate,  
 "Though far unable to prevent your fate :  
 "Behold a banished man, for your dear cause 700  
 "Exposed a prey to arbitrary laws !  
 "Yet oh that I alone could be undone,  
 "Cut off from empire, and no more a son !  
 "Now all your liberties a spoil are made,  
 "Egypt and Tyrus intercept your trade,  
 "And Jebusites your sacred rites invade.  
 "My father, whom with reverence yet I name,  
 "Charmed into ease, is careless of his fame  
 "And, bribed with petty sums of foreign gold ,  
 "Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old ; 710

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\**deluded*: betrayed; *renown*: respect; *dazzled*: surprised; *compassionating*: sympathising; *Hybla*: name of a city famous for honey; *banished*: exiled; *exposed*: open to.

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Others who joined Titus Oates were either guided by the love or for the money Titus had. In Corah's own situation, he will be seen falling for witnesses are generally liars.

### **Absalom's Campaign**

Surrounded with friends of every sort, Absalom was completely entrapped and made a scape-goat of Achitophel. He cherished in his heart high hopes to become king after the death of Charles. The mob of London was surprised to see his enthusiasm and continuously admired him. Absalom kept hid his joy and showed himself very humble and submissive. He bowed to them whom he met and it looked, as it were, he has been very familiar to them. His looks, his gestures, his words and phrases all pronounced it. Thus by nature, and by the arts furnished by nature, Absalom made his place secure in the heart of hearts of the companions of the mob.

### **Absalom's Speech**

Then with the sympathetic look and sighs, fortelling pity before he spoke. He spoke only a few words but those words were very charming and sweet, appearing like the drops of honey. [ Hybla is a Mount in Sicily, famed for its honey and bees. ]

Absalom's speech, "My countrymen, I am much grieved for your lost grandeur, your lost position, although I am unable to change the course of fate. I am an exiled fellow. [In september 1679 Monmouth was sent to Holland. He returned in November with out Charles's leave and was greeted with public acclamation. The king refused to see him, and he retired to his Whig friends in the city, as he had been banished from court.]

If I am undone, I do not mind it, if I am cut from the rights of the Empire, it also does not hurt me; if I am declaimed as a son to Charles, it also grieves me not but I am really sad to see that all your wealth is going to France (=Egypt) and Holland (=Tyrus). It pains me to see that the Papists are invading your rituals. My father seems to have been made a captive. I revere him, but he has grown careless of his fame. It is disagreeable to notice that he is always paying or receiving money from the French king and is guided by the Duchess of Portsmouth.

"Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys,  
 "And all his power against himself employs.  
 "He gives, and let him give, my right away ;  
 "But why should he his own and yours betray ?  
 "He, only he can make the nation bleed,  
 "And he alone from my revenge is freed.  
 "Take then my tears (with that he wiped eyes),  
 "'Tis all the aid my present power supplies :  
 "No court-informer can these arms accuse ;  
 "These arms may sons against their fathers use. 720  
 "And 'tis my wish, the next successor's reign  
 "May make no other Israelite complain."

### ABSALOM'S POPULARITY

Youth, beauty, graceful action seldom fail,  
 But common interest always will prevail ;  
 And pity never ceases to be shown  
 To him who makes the people's wrongs his own.  
 The crowd that still believe their kings oppress  
 With lifted hands their young Messiah bless :  
 Who now begins his progress to ordain  
 With chariots, horsemen, and a numerous train ; 730  
 From east to west his glories he displays  
 And, like the sun, the promised land surveys,  
 Fame runs before him as the morning star.  
 And shouts of joy salute him from afar ;  
 Each house receives him as a guardian god  
 And consecrates the place of his abode.  
 But hospitable treats did most commend  
 Wise Issachar, his wealthy western friend.

*exalts:* aggravates; *betray:* to deceive; *'tis:* it is; *prevail:* to remain existing; *to ordain:* to keep control; *surveys:* observes; *Consecrate:* to dedicate; *abode:* house.

*N. B. Bathesheba* : Louise—Renee de Keroualle (1649-1734) a Breton maid of honour to Charles's sister; the king's mistress from 1671; Duchess of Portsmotuh 1673. She stuck firm to the French interest and was its chief support and her influence with Charles exposed him to much contempt and distrust. )

It is ignoble that now Charles exalts his enemies and destroys his friends. He employs all his power against himself. He gives my right of succession away and let him give it, but he should not betray himself and his subject. Now he seems to bring disaster to us, but I will not avenge of my wrongs. I have been left nothing to assist you. Here are my tears if they be fruitful. My tears are my only arms and these arms cannot be accused by any court. These are the arms fit for a son to be used against his father. I wish if some other successor (=James II) comes to the throne, he is welcomed but he should not let any Londoner complain against him.

### **Absalom's Popularity**

Youth, beauty, graceful action always win a great applause. Seldom do they fail but the common interest of the public does never fail. He who takes the wrong of the public his own wrong is always held in high esteem. He is always sympathised. The crowd oppressed by the king hails the young Messiah—Monmouth.

[*N. B.* On 26 July 1680 Monmouth set out from London towards Bath, 'attended with several of the gentry and nobility,' and made a triumphal progress through. Somerest and North Devon. In September he returned to London, and set out for Oxford, where he was entertained by the city.]

In 1680, Monmouth passed through Lancashire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire triumphantly with chariots, horsemen and nobility of London. Then he displayed his valour like the sun. Fame ran before him like the morning star. ['The morning stras sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. ]

From far and near people welcomed him and they supposed him to be a guardian-god. Everybody welcomed him. *Issachar*=Tom Thynne of Longleat in Wiltshire, supported Absalom to a great deal. His burdens were (i) the expense of entertaining Monmouth, and (ii) the legal and financia embarrassment of his marriage with Lady Ogle, which was the joke of the town in November 1681.



## THE CONSPIRACY

This moving court that caught the people's eyes,  
 And seemed but pomp, did other ends disguise; 740  
 Achitophel had formed it, with intent  
 To sound the depths and fathom, where it went,  
 The people's hearts, distinguish friends from foes,  
 And try their strength before they came to blows.  
 Yet all was coloured with a smooth pretence  
 Of specious love and duty to their prince.  
 Religion and redress of grievances,  
 Two names that always cheat and always please,  
 Are often urged ; and good king David's life  
 Endangered by a brother and a wife, 750  
 Thus in a pageant show a plot is made,  
 And peace itself is war in masquerade

## THE POLITICAL ISSUE

Oh foolish Israel ! never warned by ill !  
 Still the same bait, and circumvented still !  
 Did ever men forsake their present ease.  
 In midst of health, imagine a disease,  
 Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee  
 make heirs for monarchs, and for God decree ?  
 What shall we think ? Can people give away  
 Both for themselves and sons their native sway ? 760  
 Then they are felt defenceless to the sword  
 Of each unbounded, arbitray lord ;  
 And laws are vain by which we right enjoy,  
 If kings unquestioned can those laws destroy.  
 Yet if the crowd be judge of fit and just,  
 And kings are only officers in trust,  
 Then this resuming covenant was declared  
 When kings were made, or is for ever barred.

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*pomp*: show; *intent*: desire; *grievance*: weakness; *to cheat*: to deceive; *pageant*: show; *masquerade*: revelry; *circumvented*: propagated; *Covenant*: order.

[N. B. Issachar was the name of an ass, hence 'wise'. Issachar is to be ironically construed. Thynne was a very rich man who supported, first James, and later Monmouth; he was murdered shortly after the publication of *Absalom and Achitophel*].

### **The Conspiracy**

This moving court (= Monmouth and his companions) seized the attention of the general public. Although it seemed a pomp but there were hidden some other ends. Achitophel (= Earl of Shaftesbury) had organised his own design with great intent, wherever this crowd went, Achitophel tried to distinguish between a foe and a friend, and knew their strength before they lost discipline. Outwardly every body seemed to be loyal to Charles.

There are two things which are always urged, the one is the Religion whereas the other is the redness of grievances. Charles's life fell into a danger by his own brother James and by his wife. Thus there lay hid a plot apparently seeming all gaudy and peaceful.

N. B. Duke of York was not touched in the original depositions of Oates and Tonge, but by August 1680 Oates and his confederates felt secure enough to implicate the Duke in a plot against the king's life. Charles's life was endangered by a brother because James was a Roman Catholic. His life was equally endangered by a wife because the Queen had no children and so left none for the succession to the throne.

### **The Political Issue**

London is foolish. It is always careless of adversity. It should be remembered that calamity waits still and still unwitting. Man never thinks of the approaching disease when he is in good health and comfortable surroundings. He never cares to see the coming mischiefs. They do not anticipate how heirs claim to be monarchs, and never intimate the final judgment of God. We have been left to consider nothing.

People can never give away their native right both for themselves and for their sons. If they do this, they feel themselves defenceless and think laws are made in vain if kings cannot act according to the public good. If the general public judges the merit of the king whom they have made they may overthrow him and alter the rule.

N. B. (*Lives* 759-768) According to Hobbes the State was based on a contract or covenant. Men, weary of the perpetual warfare and insecurity of the state of nature, covenanted together to surrender their right of governing themselves to a

If those who gave the sceptre could not tie  
 By their own deed their owe posterity, 770  
 How then could Adam bind his future race  
 How could his forfeit on mankind take place ?  
 Or how could heavenly justice damn us all  
 Who ne'er consented to our father's fall ?  
 Then kings are slaves to those whom they command  
 And tenants to their people's pleasure stand.  
 And that the power, for property allowed,  
 Is mischievously seated in the crowd;  
 For who can be secure of private right,  
 If sovereign sway may be dissolved by might 780  
 Nor is the people's judgment always true :  
 The most may err grossly as the few,  
 And faultless kings run down by common cry  
 For vice, oppression, and for tyranny.  
 What standard is there in a fickle rout,  
 Which, flowing to the mark, runs faster out ?  
 Nor only crowds but Sanhedrins may be  
 Infected with this public lunacy,  
 And share the madness of rebellious times,  
 To murder monarchs for imagined crimes. 790  
 If they may give and take whene'er they please,  
 Not kings alone, the Godhead's images,  
 But government itself at length must fall  
 To nature's state, where all have right to all.  
 Yet grant our lords, the people, kings can make,  
 What prudent men a settled throne would shake ?  
 For whatsoever their sufferings were before,  
 That change they covet makes them suffer more.  
 All other errors but disturb a state,  
 But innovation is the blow of fate. 800

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*sceptre*: royal mace; *posterity*: immortal; *consented*: agreed;  
*sway*: force; *prudent*: wise; *covet*: to desire; *innovation*: violence.

---

sovereign, or to a sovereign assembly. This covenant or contract was irrevocable, and the power thus transferred could not be resumed by those who gave it. Dryden and the Tories in general accepted this view. The Whigs held that the transfer of power was only conditional, not absolute.

If the public who gave king the sceptre to rule cannot bind the king to do good, it has all the power to charge its head. If it is not true Adam could not have bound the general public to be good and fidel to God. We are unable to say anything why and from what causes our ancestors had to fall from heaven. It becomes evident then, men made the king and so the king is slave to them. He must act according to their good-will. The heavenly justice is all powerful. It cannot condemn us. The laws that are made stand to the need of the subject. Just as property is for all, suppose power also is to be shared by all, *i. e.* the crowd.

Nobody can be secure of his life and property if the king becomes tyrannical or if the sovereign's commands are challanged.

Now, Dryden shows his loyalty to Charles and tries rather to proclaim the universal truth. The judgment of the public is not always true. Most of their judgments may be false. Only a few judgment is right and apprehensible. There are faultless kings but they are dethroned by the cry of the general public that they had been vicious, oppressive and tyrannical. There is no base in their argument. It fluctuates like the tides which are, like lunacy, under the moon's influence. Since the time between tides is constant, a high tide is followed by a relatively rapid ebb.

Not only the crowd but also the Parliament can be led astray and share the lunatic feelings of the crowd.

N. B. Churton Collins says, "What standard or test has an unstable and disorderly multitude, which if it has for a moment a common aim, wastes and exhausts itself all the faster."

Dryden suggests that the monarchs are not to be murdered for imagined (=fictitious) crimes. If the mob thinks that their claim is justifiable, not only monarchs but also the god's heads, the clergies and other noble men will be buried in trenches. When every individual has a right to commend, there will be insecurity and no success. The mightiest of all the governments shall tumble down. May our people and king be sanguine. If people think of their sufferings of the past, it will make them more miserable. Past is past. All the errors disturb the peace of state but the greatest of them is the violent political change. It will prove a fatal blow.

If ancient fabrics nod and threat to fall,  
 To patch the flaws and buttress up the wall,  
 Thus far 'tis duty : but here fix the mark ;  
 For all beyond it is to touch our ark.  
 To change foundations, cast the frame anew,  
 Is work for rebels who base ends pursue,  
 At once divine and human laws control,  
 And mend the parts by ruin of the whole.  
 The tampering world is subject to this curse,  
 To physic their disease into a worse.

810

## DAVID'S SUPPORTERS

Now what relief can righteous David bring ?  
 How fatal 'tis to be too good a king !  
 Friends he has few, so high the madness grows ;  
 Who dare be such must be the people's foes.  
 Yet some there were even in the worst of days ;  
 Some let me name, and naming is to praise.

## BARZILLAI

In this short file Barzillai first appears,  
 Barzillai, crowned with honour and with years.  
 Long since the rising rebels he withstood  
 In regions waste beyond the Jordan's flood :  
 Unfortunately brave to buoy the state,  
 But sinking underneath his master's fate.  
 In exile with his godlike prince he mourned,  
 For him he suffered, and with him returned.  
 The court he practised, not the courtier's art:  
 Large was his wealth but larger was his heart,  
 Which well the noblest objects knew to chuse,  
 The fighting warrior, and recording Muse.  
 His bed could once a fruitful issue boast ;  
 Now more than half a father's name is lost.

820

830

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*fabrics*: accounts; *flaws*: defects; *tampering*: grievous, hampering; *physic*: body; *David*: Charles II; *buoy*: to support; *exile*: banishment; *fruitful*: prosperous.

If ancient fables fail to tell any thing, if threats are to fall, if it is not their duty to raise the structure to support the wall, then it will be sacrilege, it will mean sure disaster.

It is no wise to change the foundation, to cast a new frame of society. If they do so, they are rebels and they pursue mean ends. They wish to control the divine and human laws but in doing so, they will ruin the whole structure of the society.

The interfering with improperly is a curse to mankind, and it will worsen and worsen the texture of humanity.

### David's Supporters

David(= Charles II) was in great peril. It is very dangerous to be a true king. He had only a few friends. The rebellious attitude against the king was at zenith. Nobody had the courage to stand against the London-mob. In spite of this there had been some of his men that had been loyal to him. Dryden gives the list of those who were loyal to the king and the court.

### Barzillai

Barzillai first appears in this list. Barzillai was James Butler (1610—88), Duke of Ormonde twelfth Earl and first Duke of Ormonde, Lord lieutenant of Ireland for Charles I and Charles II. He committed his whole fortune in the royalist cause and followed Charles II into exile. During 1677—82, he was persistently criticised by the Whigs, but resisted attempts to remove him from his post. He was wealthy but he was more wealthy of his heart than of the mundane wealth.

Ormonde had eight sons. He lost six out of them. Ormonde's eldest son was Thomas, Earl of Ossory who died in his forty-seventh year. Thus there remained none. In 1669, Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury, commended Ormonde as his successor in the Chancellorship of Oxford, both for his virtue and eminence and for his love of learning.

His eldest hope, with every grace adorned,  
 By me, so Heaven will have it, always mourned  
 And always honoured, snatched in manhood's prime  
 By unequal fates and Providence's crime:  
 Yet not before the goal of honour won,  
 All parts fulfilled of subject and of son;  
 Swift was the race, but short the time to run.  
 Oh narrow circle, but of power divine,  
 Scanted in space, but perfect in thy line !  
 By sea, by land, thy matchless worth was known, 840  
 Arms thy delight, and war was all thy own:  
 Thy force infused the fainting Tyrians propped;  
 And haughty Pharaoh found his fortune stopped.  
 Oh ancient honour ! oh unconquered hand,  
 Whom foes unpunished never could withstand !  
 But Israel was unworthy of thy name:  
 Short is the date of all immoderate fame.  
 It looks as Heaven our ruin had designed,  
 And durst not trust thy fortune and thy mind.  
 Now, free from earth, thy disencumbered soul 850  
 Mounts up, and leaves behind the clouds and starry pole:  
 From thence thy kindred legions mayest thou bring  
 To aid the guardian angel of thy King.  
 Here stop, my Muse, here cease thy painful flight;  
 No pinions can pursue immortal height:  
 Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,  
 And tell thy soul she should have fled before:  
 Or fled she with his life, and let this verse  
 To hang on her departed patron's hearse ?

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*adorned:* respected; *mourned:* grieved; *manhood prime:* youth;  
*matchless:* peerless; *Tyrians:* the Dutch; *immoderate:* not moderate;  
*fame:* reputation; *disencumbered:* dishampered; *kindred:* related to;  
*departed:* gone by; *hearse:* a structure for carrying the dead.

Although Thomas was snatched of him it was not very soon. He had gained royal favour and worldly fame in life. All his intelligent sense organs have been fulfilled. The race was swift but the sequences were not proper.

The circle is Dryden's favourite symbol of perfection. Dryden says that James Butler had a narrow circle but his power was divine. He lived a shorter life but his fame was wider and wider.

His matchless worth was known all over by sea and by land. He took delight in arms and was always careful in wars. His force yielded the Dutch (=Tyrians) twice. Earl of Ossory fought against the Dutch twice. King Louis XIV lost gaining money from England. Earl of Ossory served under the Prince of Orange against the French in 1678

Thomas was very bold. His foes could not dare stand against him. "London lost you and it seems London was unworthy of you. All immortal fame has a short duration of time. It seems that God Himself has designed our doom by taking you out from among us. It seems He did not trust Thomas's fortune and valour. [Probably God was jealous of the honour of Thomas.] Now, your unpolluted soul is free from worldly bonds. It is more and more elevating. It seems that it is leaving behind the clouds and the heavens. I hope that from there you will bring the related legions to help the guardian angel of Charles II."

**The epic device :** Now enough of my verse, the painful flight of imagination must now cease. No wings can pursue immortal height. Barzillai(=James Butler) be informed that he cannot praise his son's valour any more. He should inform his soul that she ought to have taken a flight before hand or gone out of his body, so that Dryden's verse might have hung on the structure erected over the bier, adorned with banners and devices, carrying epitaphs from friends.



Now take thy steepy flight from heaven, and see 860  
 If thou canst find on earth another he:  
 Another he would be too hard to find;  
 See then whom thou canst see not far behind.  
 Zadoc the priest, whom, shunning power and place,  
 His lowly mind advanced to David's grace

#### OTHER SUPPORTERS OF DAVID

With him the Sagan of Jerusalem,  
 Of hospitable soul and noble stem;  
 Him of the western dome, whose weighty sense  
 Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence. 870  
 The Prophets' sons, by such example led,  
 To learning and to loyalty were bred:  
 For colleges on bounteous kings depend.  
 And never rebel was to arts a friend.  
 To these succeed the pillars of the laws,  
 Who best could plead, and best can judge a cause.  
 Next them a train of loyal peers ascend;  
 Sharp judging Adriel, the Muses' friend,  
 Himself a Muses: in Sanhedrin's debate  
 True to his Prince, but not a slave of state  
 Whom David's love with honours did adorn 880  
 That from his disobedient son were torn.  
 Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought,  
 Endued by nature and by learning taught  
 To move assemblies, who but only tried  
 The worse a while, then chose the better side,  
 Nor chose alone, but turned the balance too,  
 So much the weight of one brave man can do.

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*steepy* : fast ; *shunning* : hating ; *eloquence* : speech ; *loyalty* : faithfulness ; *ascend* : to reach high ; *bounteous* : generous ; *Sanhedrin* : Parliament ; *wit* : intelligence.

Now, take your steepy flight from heaven to search out any worthier person than he had been on earth. Zadock is again parallel to him.

William Sancroft (=Zadock), 1617—93, was appointed Dean of st. Paul's in 1644, and Archbishop of Canterbury in 1678, in the view of the court. He was a very modest man and he gained high reputation in public.

### Other Supporters of David

Sagan was the Jewish high priest's deputy. With Zadoc there was one, the Sagan of Jerusalem. He was Henry Compton (1632—1713); youngest son of the Earl of Northampton and Bishop of London since 1675. He was very hospitable and he had come of a high family.

The western dome refers to John Dolben (1625—86) was also a supporter of Charles. He was wounded in the royalist cause at Marston Moor and York. He was Dean of Westminster in 1662; Bishop of Rochester in 1666, and Archbishop of Cork in 1683. He was a man of more spirit than discretion, and an excellent preacher. The Westminster boys who were inspired by Dolben's precept and example greatly honoured him. Colleges depend upon the generosity of kings. The students are to be the friends of art and antagonistic to revolts.

To these, there were statesmen who had both the power of judging and pleading. Besides them, there was a long train of loyal peers. Among them one was highly intelligent Adriel.

Adriel stands for John Sheffield (1648—1721) third earl of Mulgrave and later marquis of Normandy. He was a soldier, courtier, orator, poet and Dryden's patron in all his changes of fortune. He was true to Charles II but was not a slave of state. When Charles deprived Monmouth of his places in 1679, Sheffield got the Lord lieutenancy of the East Riding.

The other supporter, was Jotham. He was George Savile (1633—95), first Baron Savile, Viscount (1668), and Marquis (1682) of Halifax. He worked with Shaftesbury's party (1674—79), and retired to the country in 1680, but came back in the autumn of that year to hear all sides and then choose wisely on the issue of Exclusion. In the debate in the Lords on 18 November he spoke against Shaftesbury, and was so closely identified with the defeat of the Exclusion bill that the Commons addressed Charles to remove Halifax from his counsels for ever. Jotham protested eloquently against the attempt of the men of Shechem to prefer the usurper Abimilech. (*Refer to the Judges*).

Hushai, the friend of David in distress,  
 In public storms of manly steadfastness;  
 By foreign treaties he informed his youth 890  
 And joined experience to his native truth.  
 His frugal care supplied the wanting throne,  
 Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own:  
 'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow,  
 But hard the task to manage well the low,  
 For sovereign power is too depressed or high.  
 When kings are forced to sell or crowds to buy.  
 Indulge one labour more, my weary Muse,  
 For Amiel: who can Amiel's praise refuse?  
 Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet 900  
 In his own worth and without title great:  
 The Sanhedrin long time as chief he ruled,  
 Their reason guided and their passion cooled:  
 So dexterous was he in the Crown's defence,  
 So formed to speak a loyal nation's sense,  
 That, as their band was Israel's tribes in small,  
 So fit was he to represent them all.  
 Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend,  
 Whose loose careers his steady skill commend;  
 They, like the unequal ruler of the day, 910  
 Misguide the seasons and mistake the way,  
 While he, withdrawn, at their mad labour smiles  
 And safe enjoys the sabbath of his toils.

#### THEY SPEAK TO DAVID

These were the chief, a small but faithful band  
 Of worthies in the breach who dared to stand  
 And tempt the united fury of the land.  
 With grief they viewed such powerful engines be  
 To batter down the lawful government.  
 A numerous faction, with pretended flights,  
 In Sanhedrins to plume the regal rights; 920  
 The true successor from the Court removed;  
 The plot by hireling witnesses improved.

*distress*: trouble; *frugal*: thrifty; *sovereign*: royal; *Commend*:  
 devise; *breach*: noun of 'break'; *engines*: tools; *numerous*: many;  
*frights*: fears; *hirelings*: slaves.

Hushai stands for Laurence Hyde (1642—1711) was Clarendon's second son. He was created Earl of Rochester in 1682. He negotiated the Anglo-Dutch alliance of 1678. He had high notions of Government, and thought it must be maintained with great severity. He was first lord of the Treasury (1679—85). [Dryden dedicated two of his plays to Hyde, and owed him particular obligation.]

Now Dryden discusses of David's another supporter Amiel. He stands for Edward Seymour, speaker of the House of Commons from 1673 to 1679. He was one of the most skilful debaters and men of business in the kingdom and had studied all the rules and usages of the House, and thoroughly understood its public temper.

Edward Seymour was of old race by birth, although he possessed no great title. He was the chief of the Parliament for a long time. He guided their reason but always cooled their passions. He always took the part of Charles II and always turned events in Parliament in favour of the court's interest. He was very dexterous in maintaining King's command, but he was killed in 1708.

Dryden compares him to Phaeton, Phoebus's son and charioteer. Phaeton was unable to check his father's horses and hence he nearly set the earth on fire. He was, however, killed in time by Zeus and hurled into a river.

The chiefs of David's supporters have been described above. They were very few in number but they were all great. They dared to beat down the London mob. They observed with grief that on the opposite side were also many powerful worthies who had been bent upon crushing the monarchy of Charles. There had been a numerous opposition parties united-together. They terrified the Tories to bring about the destruction. They tried to arouse the members of the Parliament also. The true successor (=James) was to be removed and they had been strengthening their power by false and coward hirelings. They were bent to pluck out the legal rights, as if, they had been a bird's feathers.

These ills they saw, and, as their duty bound,  
 They showed the King the danger of the wound;  
 That no concessions from the throne would please,  
 But lenitives fomented the disease.  
 That Absalom, ambitious of the crown;  
 Was made the lure to draw the people down;  
 That false Achitophel's pernicious hate  
 Had turned the plot to ruin Church and State; 930  
 The council violent, the rabble worse;  
 That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse.

## DAVID'S SPEECH

With all these loads of injuries oppress,  
 And long revolving in his careful breast  
 The event of things, at last his patience tired,  
 Thus from his royal throne, by Heaven inspired,  
 The godlike David spoke; with awful fear  
 His train their Maker in their master hear.

"Thus long have I, by native mercy swayed  
 "My wrongs dissembled, my revenge delayed; 940  
 "So willing to forgive the offending age;  
 "So much the father did the king assuage.  
 "But now so far my clemency they slight,  
 "The offenders question my forgiving right.  
 "That one has made for many, they contend;  
 "But 'tis to rule, for that's a monarch's end.  
 "They call my tenderness of blood my fear,  
 "Though manly tempers can the longest bear  
 "Yet since they will divert my native course,  
 "'Tis time to show I am not good by force. 950

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*lenitives*: remedies; *lure*: bait; *pernicious*: dangerous; *oppress*:  
 oppressed; *swayed*: moved; *offending*: giving pain; *assuage*: to  
 remove; *clemency*: mercy; *divert*: to be away from.

The supporters of David marked all these dangers and informed the king that proper remedies ought to be used to remove this disease. They told him that Absalom was made to stand as the legal successor. Achitophel (=Shaftesbury) was trying to ruin both the Church and the State. The council was violent, the mob was also bitter and Shimi taught them to curse the London Government.

### David's Speech

When David felt highly agitated and when he had thought wisely of all the ins and outs, with great majesty he spoke to them,

“For such a long period, being guided by the native mercy, I did not take heed of the wrongs done to me, and I often delayed in taking any revenge. I had been always willing to pardon my antagonist. I appeased them as one's father appeases one's children. I had been kind-hearted to them; I had been merciful to them but now they are reproaching my tenderness of heart. The offenders are questioning my right of forgiving (it is strange !) them.

[The commons questioned Charles's right to pardon his minister Danby, impeached in 1679. In December 1680 the sheriffs disputed his power to commute the penalty for Stafford from hanging, drawing and quartering to decapitation.]

They realise that one king is made to rule many but king knows better how to rule. It is the king's end to judge and not those of individuals. My mercy is misconstrued as fear. I am merciful but I am not coward. It is difficult to keep control upon innumerable tempers of the heart and be not misguided by them.

"Those heaped affronts that haughty subjects bring  
 "Are burdens for a camel, not a king.  
 "Kings are the public pillars of the State,  
 "Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight:  
 "If my young Samson will pretend a call  
 "To shake the column, let him share the fall;  
 "But oh that yet he would repent and live !  
 "How easy 'tis for parents to forgive !  
 "With how few tears a pardon might be won  
 "From nature, pleading for a darling son ! 960  
 "Poor pitied youth, by my paternal care  
 "Raised up to all the height his frame could bear !  
 "Had God ordained his fate for empire born.  
 "He would have given his soul another turn:  
 "Gulled with a patriot's name, whose modern sense  
 "Is one that would by law supplant his prince;  
 "The people's brave, the politician's tool;  
 "Never was patriot yet but was a fool.  
 "Whence comes it that religion and the laws  
 "Should more be Absalom's than David's cause 970  
 "His old instructor, ere he lost his place,  
 "Was never thought endued with so much grace.  
 "Good heavens, how faction can a patriot paint !  
 "My rebel ever proves my people's saint.  
 "Would they impose an heir upon the throne ?  
 "Let Sanherdins be taught to give their own.  
 "A king's at least a part of government,  
 "And mind as requisite as their consent;  
 "Without my leave a future king to choose  
 "Infers a right the present to depose. 980

*affronts* : insults ; *haughty* : ambitious ; *prop* : to support ;  
*young Samson* : Monmouth ; *paternal* : fatherly ; *ordained* : managed ; *whence* : from where ; *requisite* : belongings.

It is time to give proof to our strength. The haughty rebels are heaping on us obstacles after obstacles.. They may be a burden to a camel but never for a king. Kings are born to support the state as the pillars support a building. I am born to sustain the weight of the monarchy and do public good.

If the Duke of Monmouth (=my young Samson), my son is pleased to take a part in the revolt, it does not matter. He may share the fall but I am grieved to think that he will live and repent for what he has done.

I shall pardon him. He is my son. Parents are made to forgive the faults of their issues. It is very surprising. The child asks for pardon by shedding a few drops of tears and he is pardoned.

Monmouth is young. I did my best to let him achieve name and fame. Had he been born to be my successor, God must have given him another soul. He ought to have been my legitimate son. He has been cheated. "Having lost his honour his Prince, and reputation with the best with of men, he cringes and creeps, and sneaks, to the lowest and basest of the people, to procure himself an empty, vain-glorious, and undeserved name, the *Patriot* of his Country."

Monmouth is fallen as a tool in the hands of the rebels. The patriot is at times befooled. He is the instrument of Shaftesbury, and the people's braggart.

There is no ground that the rights of David (=Charles) should be that of Absalom. Absalom's old instructor (=Earl of Shaftesbury) was highly respected and honoured before his fall. It is strange how a patriot may change into a rebel. My rebel (=Shaftesbury) proves that he had been greatly venerated by the general public, now he wishes to enthrone Monmouth as my future heir. It is wrong because Monmouth is my illegitimate son. The Parliament will give its own judgment.

A king is at least a part of government. He does what their consent is. Without my leave, no body can be enthroned and if enthroned it is nothing but deposing me.



"True, they petition me to approve their choice:  
 "But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.  
 "My pious subjects for my safety pray,  
 "Which to secure, they take my power away.  
 "From plots and treasons Heaven preserve my years,  
 "But save me most from my petitioners.  
 "Unsatiate as the barren womb or grave,  
 "God cannot grant so much as they can crave.  
 "What then is left but with a jealous eye  
 "To guard the small remains of royalty ? 990  
 "The law shall still direct my peaceful sway,  
 "And the same law teach rebels to obey:  
 "Votes shall no more established power control,  
 "Such votes as make a part exceed the whole.  
 "No groundless clamours shall my friends remove  
 "Nor crowds have power to punish ere they prove;  
 "For gods and godlike kings their care express  
 "Still to defend their servants in distress.  
 "Oh that my power to saving were confined !  
 "Why am I forced, like Heaven, against my mind 1000  
 "To make examples of another kind ?  
 "Must I at length the sword of justice draw ?  
 "Oh curst effects of necessary law !  
 "How ill my fear they by my mercy scan !  
 "Beware the fury of a patient man.  
 "Law they require, let Law then show her face;  
 "They could not be content to look on Grace,  
 "Her hinder parts, but with a daring eye  
 "To tempt the terror of her front and die.  
 "By their own arts, 'tis righteously decreed, 1010

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*treasons* : treacheries ; *clamours* : noise, agitation ; *confined* :  
 limited ; *scan* : to scale ; *content* : satisfied with : *daring* :  
 courageous.

It is true they are making petitions by all their veiled threats.

["Though they pretend to petition me humbly and deferentially, they are practically employing force.]

My pious subjects pray for my safety and the rebels want to depose me of my power, how is it that I will remain an instrument to my State.

May God preserve my years from plots and treasons, but He must save me most from my petitioners as they are all false. Their desires will never be satiated. [Refer to the *Proverbs*: There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, it is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.]

God cannot grant as much as one wishes to achieve. If all the wills of any man are granted, there remains nothing. The law shall bind me to do good to my subjects and the same law will teach the rebels to execute my command.

Votes can never control power. Only the minority wins over the majority. My friends will not remove the unreasonable shouting of the mob. The crowds have no power to punish their king before they prove it. The reason is that gods and kings have to take great measures in removing the distress of the general public.

I wish, my power to punish these rebels would have been limited. Then I would not have had the courage to stand against my own men. Must I draw the sword of justice against them. oh, it is very troublesome. The necessity of law is to be cursed. My mercy is misconstrued as fear. One should be cautious of the fury of a man of patience.

They (=the factious party) demand law and shall have law. They are, not content with my clemency, with grace or mercy which is as it were, the hinder parts of law and may be seen with safety-but rashly demand to see the very face of law.

"Those dire artificers of death shall bleed.  
 "Against themselves their witnesses will swear  
 "Till viper-like, their mother-plot they tear,  
 "And suck for nutriment that bloody gore  
 "Which was their principle of life before.  
 "Their Belial with their Beelzebub will fight ;  
 "Thus on my foes shall do me right,  
 "Nor doubt the event ; for factious crowds engage  
 "In their first onset all their brutal rage.  
 "Then let them take an unresisted course ; 1020  
 "Retire and traverse, and delude their force ;  
 "But when they stand all breathless, urge the fight  
 "And rise upon them with redoubled might :  
 "For lawful power is still superior found,  
 "When long driven back at length it stands the ground."

#### A NEW ORDER BEGINS

He said. The Almighty, nodding, gave consent ;  
 And peals of thunder shook the firmament.  
 Henceforth a series of new time began,  
 The mighty years in long procession ran;  
 Once more the godlike David was restored, 1030  
 And willing nations knew their lawful lord.

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*Viper* : venomous snake ; *righteously* : legal ; *decreed* : judgment ; *nutriment* : food ; *gore* : blood ; *foes* : enemies ; *rage* : anger ; *unresisted* : unchecked ; *traverse* : to walk ; *restored* : revived ; *lord* : king.

[It should be remembered that Moses saw only the back of God, His "hinder parts", had Moses seen God's front, the sight would have destroyed him. Charles's subjects had so far seen only law's 'hinder parts, i. e. grace and clemency, since they demand law, the rebels can now see the front also, and perish in consequence.]

It has been rightly judged that these rebels will die of their own death by their own hands. Their followers will turn-against them. They will be blown like viper. If they wish to tear off their motherland, they will fall to ground and suck their own blood for their nutriment. Like the Biblical story their Belial and Beelzebub will fight together which will bring out nothing but a terrible disaster to them only.

Let them do what they wish, let them march onward, let them retire and march and delude their power. Why? They will lose all their strength and ability to command. Lawful power is superior to all the means of power. Lawful power becomes successful in the long run and the factions are all outdone.

### **A New order begins**

When Charles II had finished his speech, the peals of thunder was heard from the heavens. [The peals of thunder were an indication that God approved of David's (Charles's) plans. Henceforth a new time began and god-like Charles II was restored to his throne and all the friendly nations of England realised him as their legal master.

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### Some very important explanations

**N. B.** In the first explanation the reference to context is written in full, in others it is expected boys will utilise the same.

**1. Then...** .....land (ll. 5-8)

The present extract has been abstracted from Dryden's satirical work 'Absalom and Achitophel.' To Dryden 'the true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction. And he who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease.

*Absalom and Achitophel* forms an era in the history of English classical satire. From the fall of Clarendon in August, 1667, to the death of Shaftesbury in January, 1683, England was in a high state of ferment and agitation. The mad joy of 1660 had undergone its natural reaction, and this reaction was intensified by a long series of national calamities and political blunders. There were feuds in the Cabinet and among the people; the religion of the country was in imminent peril; the Royal house had become a centre of perfidity and disaffection.

In this extract Dryden points out how Charles II (=David=Israel's monarch) was devoid of celestial glory.

It was in the later half of the seventeenth century that in France and England there was no restriction of polygamy. David, and so by analogy Charles II, had no legitimate son. He was married to Catharine of Braganza in May, 1662, but she had borne him no children. He began to love others who bore him many sons. He was like a slave to them.

**N. B.** "The lord sought him a man after his own heart." These opening verses, in explaining the trouble caused by the king's having no legitimate issue, some what profanely palliate his notorious profligacy. The reference of course, is to his numerous children by his numerous mistresses.

1. Lucy Walters, mother of Monmouth and a daughter afterwards married to a Mr. William Sarsfield.
2. The Duchess of Cleveland mother of the Duke of Southampton, the Duke of Grafton, the Duke of Northumberland, the

countess of Sussex, the countess of Litchfield, and a daughter who became a nun.

3. The Duchess of Portsmouth, mother of the Duke of Richmond.
4. Nell Gwynn, mother of the Duke of St. Albans and of James Beauclerk.

Mary Davis, Lady Shannon, and Catharine Peg, by whom Charles became the father respectively of Lady Derwentwater, the Countess of Yarmouth, and the Earl of Plymouth.

2. **Early**.....**love** (ll. 23-26)

The Duke of Monmouth, called here Absalom, won many battles in foreign lands and gained much reputation in Holland and France. When there was no battle, it seemed as if, he were, a not uncommon ellipse. He was very beautiful and it seemed he were born to love.

**N. B.** Monmouth served two campaigns as a volunteer in Louis XIV's army against the Dutch in 1672 and in 1673, particularly distinguishing himself at the siege of Maestricht. In 1678 he was in command of the British troops in coalition with the Dutch against the French, and again acquitted himself with great distinction in August, 1678, at the battle of St. Denis.

*Allied to Israel's crown : Holland and France.*

3. **Whate'er**.....**face** (ll. 27-30)

Dryden refers to the bodily and mental qualities of the Duke of Monmouth. Whatever he did, he did most vigorously and naturally. He had such a grace that it appeared even Paradise smiled in him.

**N. B.** Pope echoes the last line thus :  
"And Paradise was open'd on the wild."

4. **With**.....**bride** (ll. 31-34)

Charles II marked in Duke of Monmouth his own image and was greatly pleased. He denied him nothing that he wished. Later on he gave him as his wife Annabel.

**N. B.** Monmouth's wife was Anne Scott, Countess of Buccleuch, the only surviving daughter of Francis Earl of Buccleuch and one of the richest heiress in Europe. They were married in April 1663. Her charms have been celebrated both by Madame Dunois and Evelyn. She was a patroness of Dryden who dedicated *The Indian Emperor* to her.

**5. And Amnon's ..... reigned** (ll. 39-42)

It is said that Sir John Coventry (= Amnon) was murdered by the agencies of Duke of Monmouth, but it is not certain. (*read below*). Monmouth was praised and loved a great deal when Charles II (= David) reigned in London (= Sion).

**N. B.** "This allusion has never been satisfactorily explained. Sir Walter Scott supposes it to refer to the slitting of Sir John Coventry's nose by Monmouth's agency, in consequence of a sarcastic allusion of Coventry's in the House of Commons to the king's amours. But this was not murder, others explain it as a reference to a disgraceful affair of which Andrew Marvell, in a letter dated Feb, 28th, 1671, gives an account: "On Saturday night last, or rather Sunday morning at two o' clock, some persons reported to be of great quality, together with other gentleman, set upon the watch, and killed a poor beadle praying for his life upon his knees, with many wounds." Adding in another letter: "Doubtless you have heard how Monmouth, Albemarle, Dunbane, etc., fought with the watch and killed a poor beadle: they have all got their pardon for Monmouth's sake, but it is an act of great scandal." But Dryden is hardly to have designated a beadle as Amnon, and the affair had no connection with "revenge for injur'd fame." It appears to be an allusion to some other passage in Monmouth's life on which light has yet to be thrown."

**6. They who ..... King** (ll. 57-60)

When Oliver Cromwell (= Saul) was dead, people made Richard Cromwell (= Ishbosheth) their king or dictator, but they were not satisfied with his rule, hence they invited Charles II (= David) from Scotland (= Hebron) and proclaimed him their king.

**N. B. Foolish Ishbosheth :** Richard Cromwell, who on the death of his father succeeded to the Protectorship, which he was practically forced into resigning when he dissolved Parliament in April 22nd, 1659. "He was a meeke, temperate, and quiett man, but had not a spirit fit to succeed his father, or to manage such a perplexed government."

**Hebron** in the second Part of this poem means Scotland, and assuming that the same signification is given to it here, it may be a reference to Monk's march from Scotland between December, 1659, and February, 1660, which practically brought about the Restoration; or it may be a reference to the fact that Charles had been already crowned King of Scotland. We should naturally expect it to mean the Netherlands or Brussels, where Charles was residing when he received the invitation to return, as King, to England.

**7. The inhabitants ..... strong (ll. 85-88)**

The inhabitants of old London were Roman Catholics and London was the native home of those people, but when the Protestants became stronger, the Roman Catholics had to surrender.

**N. B. The chosen people :** From here Dryden proceeds to review the position of the Papists in England and the events which led to the Popish Plot. The lines which follow with reference to their impoverishment and their being "deprived of all command," are allusions to the numerous statutes which had, since the accession of Elizabeth, been promulgated for the suppression of popery, and more particularly to the severe statutes which had been passed and enforced since the accession of Charles II. "Their gods disgraced and burnt like common wood," is an allusion not only to the wholesale destruction of images and relics at the Reformation, but to what regularly occurred on every anniversary of the 5th of November.

**8. This set ..... gold (ll. 98-103)**  
(Refer to the Paraphrase.)

**9. Some truth ..... all (ll. 114-117)**

The Popish Plot by Titus Oates was not groundless. That there was some slight foundation for Oates's assertions is



generally acknowledged by contemporary and subsequent historians. But there was some dash in it. To dash is to disturb by throwing in, so to mix or adulterate. The image is from a pot boiling. The plot seemed to please the fools and to perplex the wise. The forth coming generation will call it wise or poor, no body can say. To believe the part or the whole seemed equally foolish and wise.

**10. By force ..... persuade** (ll. 122-125)

( *Refer to the paraphrase* )

**11. Which ..... day** (ll. 128-131)

The Whigs were less in number, the Tories were in majority. The Whigs had been Presbyterians. They wanted to convert all to their faith. Some of them were deadly against the monarchy.

**N. B.** Dryden had said above that "priests of all religions are the same", and this satire on the Protestant clergy is as severe as that against the Roman Catholics. The reference in the last line is to the alleged project of Pickering, Groves and Ireland to assassinate the king in April 1678.

**12. This plot.....flood** (ll. 134-137)

The Popish Plot failed but it had a grave effect. Just as when a man is hot in fever, he becomes insane, or when it is very hot, the stream dries up, so it happened with the state. Had it not been for the incredible recklessness of Oates and his accomplices there can be little doubt that the Whigs would have carried all before them.

**13. Great wits ..... div'de** (ll. 163-164)

Here Dryden is like a moralist, preaching his principle to the general public that all great men have some flaws in them.  
( *Read the paraphrase and add* )

Greatness on goodness loves to slide, not stand,  
And leaves for Fortune's ice Virtue's firm land.

**14. So easy ..... land** (ll. 180-199)

These lines were added in the second edition. There is an absurd story that Dryden introduced them to soften his

attack on Shaftesbury, because the Earl had procured a nomination of one of Dryden's sons to the Charter-house. The fact is that Shaftesbury made a very good lord Chancellor, a fact which was notorious, and Sir Walter Scott well observes that these and other passages, in which Dryden has softened the severity of his satire, illustrate not only the poet's taste and judgment, but "that tone of honourable and just feeling which distinguishes a true satire from a libellous lampoon."

The judicious mixture of praise adds pungency to censure, as the soft plume gives swiftness to the dart.

**15. He stood.....takes (ll. 205-208)**

What drove Shaftesbury into opposition to the court was that the king alarmed at the remonstrances of the people against popery, broke the seal he had affixed to the Declaration of Indulgence, and so deceived his ministers and exposed them to the fury of the Commons. "The Cabal took the same sudden turn with the king, Shaftesbury observing that 'the prince who forsook himself deserved to be forsaken'. He then put himself at the head of the opposition to the court."

Though Shaftesbury may perhaps be absolved from the charge of complicity in the invention of the Popish Plot, there can be no doubt that he utilized it.

We now know certainly, and it was known to some even then that Charles II had privately declared himself a Roman Catholic in 1669, and had shortly afterwards made a secret engagement with Louis XIV to establish popery in England. So, as Mr. Christie observes, Shaftesbury invented no calumny.

**16. Heaven has.....fate (ll. 252-253)**

"There is a tide in the affairs of men" and compare it with Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*.

There is a deep nick in time's restless wheel

For each man's good when which nick comes, it strikes.

So, here is Shaftesbury arousing Monmouth to grasp the opportunity at once and not let it go.

**17. And nobler is a limited command. (ll. 299)**

The legitimacy of Duke of Monmouth, though boldly and

repeatedly asserted by his immediate partizans, did not receive general credit even in the popular faction. It was one of Shaftesbury's advantages to have chosen for the ostensible head of his party a candidate whose right had he ever attained to the crown, must have fluctuated between an elective and hereditary title. The consciousness of how much he was to depend on Shaftesbury's arts obliged the Duke to remain at the devotion of that intriguing politician.

**18. What ..... fire** (ll. 303-308)

Dryden comments here on the aspiration of youth and curses the effect of flattery. Shaftesbury makes Monmouth think that he is the legitimate heir to the throne and James has no right to stand against him.

In a diadectic tone Dryden comments that Shaftesbury's praising and flattering Monmouth changed his feelings. It is but natural that flattery and praise are the curse of life.

**N. B.** Observe the skill with which all blame is diverted from Monmouth and thrown on Shaftesbury and the art with which the Duke and his royal father are flattered. Compare Pope's lines—

Ambition first sprang from your blest abodes,  
The glorious faults of angels and of gods,  
Thence to their images on earth it flows,  
And in the breasts of kings and heroes glows.

**19. If mildness.....attribute** (ll. 327-28)  
(*Read the paraphrase*)

**20. 'Tis.....proclaim** (ll. 383-386)

Shaftesbury is called by Dryden as 'Hell's dire agent.' He tells him that his father is very kind, just and honourable but when these attributes are in high order, they become a disgrace to the king. Might becomes right. A coward, devoid of strength, is not charitable. He is a coward after all. If Monmouth's father had been generous to all, it is supposed he lacked courage.

**2.1 If not.....them** (ll. 408-410)

As an historian, Dryden comments through the mouth

of Shaftesbury that men made king and as such they must be governed by men.

**N.B.** The submission of a free people to the executive authority of government is no more than a compliance with laws which they themselves have enacted.

21. *All empire is no more than power in trust,  
Which, when resumed, can be no longer just.*

(Refer to the paraphrase)

22. **Better one suffer than a nation grieve :**

This is the miraculous line. If there is some advantage to the whole of the nation, it does not matter if one is put at the stake.

23. **It surely ..... Israel (431-432)**

(Read the paraphrase)

24. **Self defence is Nature's eldest law** (line 458)

(Students should write an essay on it)

Man is mortal. All the beings are mortal. The law of adaptation to one's surroundings counts a great deal. Every one wishes to be immortal, so it is the nature's law to seek one's own comforts and safety. Naturally Shaftesbury goads Monmouth to gird up his loins against Charles and be victorious.

25. **Remember and comment upon—**

- (a) Plighted vows too late to be undone.
- (b) They, who possess the Prince, possess the law.

(For help refer to the paraphrase)

26. **In the first.....epitome (ll. 544-546)**

There had been people of various attributes, and all of them tried to gain favour and power from the king but in their heart of hearts they had been against him. Among them was Zimri, George Villiers. He was the second Duke of Buckingham, the son of the favourites of Charles I. He was born 30th January, 1627, and, after a long career of profligacy and folly, he died at Kirby Moorside, 17th April, 1687. [He died at the house of one of his tenants and not at a poor inn as Pope has represented. Dryden's model was undoubtedly Horace's

portrait of Tigellius with a touch or two from Juvenal's Greek parasite. Dryden was very proud of this character and thought it 'worth the whole poem.']

Zimri seemed to be an admixture of all the qualities of mankind. He was a summary of the whole of the nation. He was an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman, a buffoon and above all a merry-go-lucky man indulged in eating, drinking and luxurious sports.

**27. Laughed himself from court** (line 576)

( *Read the paraphrase* )

**28. And therefore.....lamb** (ll. 573-576)

( *Students are to note the following and read the paraphrase* )

**Balaam**, the Earl of Huntingdon was one of the seventeen peers who signed the petition entreating the king to have recourse to the advice of his parliament. He was also the one chosen to present it, 7th Dec. 1679. He was one of the petitioners to the king in 1681 against holding the Parliament at Oxford, and was thoroughly obnoxious to the Court.

**Cold Caleb**, Lord Grey of Wark is said to have been so callous and described as to allow Monmouth to intrigue with his wife. He was subsequently engaged in the Rye House Plot, and landed with Monmouth at Lyme in 1685. He was present at the skirmish at Bridport and at the Battle of Sedgemoor, in both of which engagements he disgraced himself by his cowardice. A criminal intrigue with his sister-in-law led to a famous trial. He subsequently became Earl of Tankerville and in 1699 was First Lord of the Treasury.

**Canting Nadab** .....: Lord Howard of Escricke was one of the most amusing but abandoned men of the age. He was one of the most intimate associates of Monmouth and Shaftesbury. Dryden's reference is to this: The informer Fitzharris had written a shameful libel against the Court, was convicted of high treason, and to save his life, which was however forfeited, asserted that Lord Howard had instigated him to forge a document incriminating the Queen and the Duke of York. Howard was accordingly sent to the Tower where he published a declaration asserting his innocence, and this he is

said to have confirmed by taking the sacrament in lamb's wool, i. e. ale poured on roasted apples and sugar. Mr. Christie quotes two passages from contemporary satires referring to his profanity—

With Mahomet wine he damneth, with intent  
To erect his paschal lamb's wool sacrament.

He was afterwards involved in the Rye House Plot, and to save his own life basely informed against Algernon Sidney, Russel, and Hampden. Dryden's expression is as coarse and profane as the act which he reprobates.

**29. Not bull-faced .....curse.** (ll. 581-584)

Sir William Jones was a very able and honest lawyer. He became Serjeant-at Law in 1669, Solicitor-General in Nov. 1673, Attorney-General in June, 1675, and he died in 1682. He was no flatterer, but a man of morose temper, so he was against all the measures that they took at Court. As Attorney-General he had conducted the prosecution against those engaged in the Popish Plot; but some time after he resigned office and joined the opposition. He drew up the Habeas Corpus Act, and probably the Exclusion Bill.

**30. Shimei.....grain** (ll. 585-588)

Slingsby Bethel was the son of Sir Walter Bethel, who was a staunch Royalist and was beheaded by Cromwell's High Court of Justice. In 1680 Slingsby was chosen one of the sheriffs of the city of London, and to qualify himself for his office renounced the Covenant, received the sacrament, but adhered to his factious principles. Eccentric and mean, he kept no table, but lived at a chop house, giving no entertainment during the whole of his shrievalty. He turned from the ordinary way of a sheriff's living into the extreme of sordidness. His stinginess passed into a proverb, and 'to Bethel the city' became a phrase used to describe a sheriff who gave poor entertainments.

**31. Yet, Corah, thou shalt from oblivion pass** (line 632)

We should not forget to take the name of Corah (=Titus Oates) who wished to see the downfall of King Charles II.

Titus Oates was the son of an Anabaptist ribbon-weaver. He is said to have been educated at Merchant Tailors' school,

and to have gone from thence to Cambridge. He then took orders, and officiated as a curate in Kent and Sussex, but, being guilty of gross immorality, he was suspended. He then went over to the Church of Rome, and obtained admission into the Jesuit's College at St. Omer. Returning to England, he concocted the infamous fictions about the alleged Conspirators in the Popish Plot. For the supposed service he had thus done the King he received a pension of £ 1200, was lodged in Whitehall, and protected by guards. On the accession of James II, proceedings were taken against him, and an enormous fine imposed ; finally he was tried for perjury. After changing his religion several times, he died nominally a Baptist in 1705.

**32. A church vermillion ..... etc.** (ll. 649 - 652)

[ *Read the Paraphrase.* ]

**33. For Agag's murder call** (line 676)

Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey was the magistrate before whom Oates had affirmed on oath his account of the Popish Plot. Not long afterwards, Sir Edmund was found in a ditch on Primrose Hill murdered, with his own sword thrust through his body. As Sir Edmund had been unwilling to receive the depositions of Oates, and was reputed to be friendly to the Papists, Dryden implies that he was murdered, as a friend of the Roman Catholics, at the instigation of Oates.

**34. Behold..... laws** (700-701)

Monmouth had been sent out of England by the king in September, 1679. He returned without permission in November. The king then ordered him to quit England, and he disobeyed. He was then deprived of all his offices, and banished from Court.

**35. The Crowd..... wise Issacar** (ll. 727-738)

These lines describe the progress which, at the advice of Shaftesbury, Monmouth made in 1680 through Lancashire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Cheshire, Devonshire and Somerset.

Thomas Thynne of Longleat was one of the richest Commissioners in England, and was called from his great wealth Tom of Ten Thousand.' He had formerly been a friend and favourer

rite of the Duke of York, but afterwards quarrelling with him, he joined Monmouth's party, and entertained him most magnificently on the occasion of the progress mentioned. He was afterwards in Feb. 1682 murdered by assassins employed by Count Königsmark.

**36. What standard is there** ..... (ll. 785.....)

This very obscure couplet appears to mean : What standard or test has an unstable and disorderly multitude, which, if it has for a moment a common aim, wastes and exhausts it self all the faster. The metaphor is from water which in flowing to a mark, and so acquiring impetus, is by its very impetus carried on and past—into waste.

**37. To touch our ark** (line 804)

It is metaphorically used for what is most sacred among the Israelites; as it was forbidden on pain of death for any save the priests to touch the ark.

**38. Some let me name :** Dryden now passes in review the statesmen who were loyal to Charles and the Court party. The Duke of Ormond (Barzillai), Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury (Zadoc), Compton, Bishop of London (the Sagan of Jerusalem), Dolben, Bishop of Rochester (Him of the western dome) the Earl of Mulgrave (Adriel), the Marquis of Halifax (Jotham), Laurence Hyde (Hushai), Sir Edward Seymour (Amiel).

**39. Barzillai :** James Butler, successively Earl, Marquis, and Duke of Ormond, was born October 19th, 1610. All his life he was a staunch and devoted servant of the house of Stuart : his first services were under Wentworth, afterwards Earl of Strafford. Even his enemies acknowledged his ability and honesty. In the government of Ireland, of which country he was four times lord lieutenant, namely from 1642 to 1647, 1648 to 1650, 1662 to 1669, and from 1677 to 1685. He accompanied Charles II during his exile, zealously serving him during the time of his misfortunes on many important occasions. In the profligate Court of his royal master he was insulted by the King's favourites, particularly by Buckingham, who is said to have incited the notorious Captain Blood to assassinate him. His unswerving fidelity, stern integrity, and immaculate virtue seem to have



overawed Charles, who knew the value of such a servant, though he had little in common with his character. Ormond's loyalty is sufficiently attested by Charles II himself. He died July 21st, 1688.

**40. To look on Grace, Her hinder parts.....(1077-8)**

Law is as terrible to look on as the face of God would have been to Moses, and as Moses was permitted to see only the back of God, or otherwise he could not have lived, so up to the present time these people had been permitted to see only the hinder part of Law, i. e. Grace, now they shall behold her face and perish.

The reference is of course to *Exodus*.

**41. Peals of thunder :** The peal of thunder was with the Greek and Roman epic poets the symbol that prayer was heard and granted.

## SOME HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT

### (a) The Popish Plot

In the autumn of 1678 a man called Titus Oates (= Corah in the *Absalom and Achitophel*) made a statement to a London magistrate declaring the existence of a *Popish Plot*, the objects of which were to murder the King, to put the Duke of York in his place and to bring a French army into England. Shortly afterwards the magistrate(= Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey) was found dead, having been obviously murdered. At once the nation, always in dread of Popish plots, took alarm, and a panic began. Every word of Titus Oates was believed, though he was really a thorough scoundrel. [He had been expelled successively from his school, the Navy, and two Jesuit Colleges, besides having had writs issued against him on two occasions for perjury.]

Other informers sprang up in every direction; and Roman Catholics were tried and executed on the flimsiest evidence. Protestants carried flails to protect themselves from imaginary Roman Catholic assaults, whilst the Houses of Parliament without one dissentient declared a damnable and hellish plot to be in existence. Of course, there was in a sense a plot—in which Charles himself was implicated by the Treaty of Dover—to

restore Catholicism in England, but the details of this particular plot were a pure fabrication. Shaftesbury and the Opposition, however, made unscrupulous use of the plot. For they were anxious to divert the succession from Charles II's brother James to an illegitimate son of the King's, known as the Duke of Monmouth; and they hoped that this proposal would, in consequence of the alleged plot, meet with much popular support.

**Result :** It led to the collapse of Danby's power and the Country party became predominant under Shaftesbury. The Exclusion Bill was introduced to exclude James, Duke of York, from the throne.

### (b) Habeas Corpus Act

In the same autumn (1678) some negotiations which Danby had, by Charles's command undertaken for the supply of money from the French King were discovered, and Danby was impeached. Charles, to save him, dissolved the Cavalier Parliament, which had sat since 1661 (January, 1679). There followed in a space of two years three short Parliaments (1679-81). The first of these insisted upon committing Danby to the Tower despite the King's pardon, thereby developing the principle of the responsibility of ministers. It also passed, through Shaftesbury's influence, the very important *Habeas Corpus Act*, the object of which was to ensure that a man who was imprisoned should be brought up for trial as soon as possible.

### (c) The Exclusion Bill

In all these short Parliaments, however, the chief topic was the Bill for excluding James from the succession, the Opposition being resolved to make an effort to prevent the accession of a Roman Catholic. Hence Shaftesbury and the Opposition pressed for the succession of the Protestant Duke of Monmouth, who, they held, was a legitimate son of Charles, the marriage certificate of his mother with Charles being secreted (so it was alleged) in a certain "black box." Charles however, said he would rather see his son hanged than legitimize him. It was during this time that Political Parties were first organized. At first they were known under the names of *Petitioners* and *Abhorers*, from the fact that one party petitioned for the calling

of Parliament, whilst the other expressed their abhorrence of any encroachment on the King's Prerogative ; later they came to be called by their respective opponents. *Whigs* (Scots *Whig*, to jog along) after the name of certain fanatical Scots Covenanters, and *Tories* after some wild Irish Roman Catholic rebels ; and the names are still in use to our own day. The last of the three Parliaments was summoned by the King to meet not in London where the mob was fiercely hostile to the Court, but at Oxford in the Convocation House ; and men came armed — so great was the excitement. But it had only lasted a week when Charles dissolved it, and the Exclusion Bill was still unpassed (1681).

The Bill is important as during the agitation over it the system of party government began. The King having dissolved Parliament, the country party sent numerous *petitions* urging him to call a new Parliament. The Court party, on the other hand, sent counterpetitions expressing their *abhorrence* of such an attempt to force the King's will, which they regarded as an encroachment on the royal prerogative. The rival parties were termed, in consequence, *Petitioners* and *Abhorrrers*—names which were soon afterwards changed for **Whig** and **Tory**.

### Allegorical Parallelism

*Absalom and Achitophel* is a satirical poem written in heroic couplets, by Dryden (1681). The poem deals in allegorical form with the attempt by Lord Shaftesbury's party to exclude the Duke of York from the succession and to set the Duke of Monmouth in his place. Chief among the characters are Monmouth (Absalom); Shaftesbury (the false tempter, Achitophel) : the Duke of Buckingham (Zimri) , who, as responsible for the *Rehearsal* was particularly obnoxious to Dryden; Charles II (David) ; Titus Oates (Corah).

The Poem, which was immensely popular, was followed in 1682 by a second part, which was in the main written by Nahum Tate but revised by Dryden, Who contributed the famous characters of Doeg (Settle) and Og (Shadwell).

1. **Absalom**, the son of David, who rebelled against his father. His death occasioned David's lament in 2 Samuel. xviii. 33.

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom.

And the victory that day was *turned* into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son.

And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.

But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son my son.

And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines.

In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: For this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.

2. **David**, king, the second king of Israel, the youngest son of the tribe of Judah. In his youth he 'slew the Philistine giant Goliath (*1. Samuel XVII*). On the death of Saul he became king of Judah, and after the murder of Ishbosheth, of the whole of Israel (*2 Samuel, ii and v*). His last years were darkened by the rebellion and death of his son Absalom (*2. Samuel XV-XVII*).

**David** and **Jonathan** were the types of loving friends. Jonathan was son of Saul, David was Saul's appointed successor as king of Israel.

3. **Doeg** : Elkanah Settle ( 1648-1724), was the author of a series of bombastic dramas which endangered at court Dryden's popularity as a dramatist. Settle's heroic play, *The Empress of Morocco* in particular, had considerable vogue. Dryden satirized Settle as Doeg in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*.

4. **Og**: Thomas Shadwell, dramatist and poet, produced the *Sullen Lovers* based on Moliere's *Les Facheux* at Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, in 1668. His dramatic pieces include an opera, the *Enchanted Island*, 1673, *Timon of Athens* (1678), *Epson Wells* (1773), and *Bury Fair* (1689). The last two give interesting pictures of contemporary manners. Shadwell was at open feud with Dryden from 1682, the quarrel arising out of some qualified praise bestowed by the latter Ben Jonson. The two poets repeatedly attacked one another in satires, among which were Dryden's *Medal* and *Mac Flecknoe*, and Shadwell's *The Medal of Joh. Bayes* (1682) and a translation of the *Tenth Satire of Juvenal* (1687). Shadwell superseded Dryden as poet laureat at the revolution, but his claims to the position were not high.

5. **Ach'tophel** : Anthony Ashley Cooper was the first Baron Ashley and first earl of Shaftesbury (1621-83), a statesman prominent on the King's side in the Parliamentary War, and after the Restoration as a member of the Cabal and Chancellor. After his dismissal he was leader of the opposition, and a supporter of Monmouth. He was satirized as Achitophel in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*:

#### Read Chapters in the Bible.

1. Samuel , i 31.
  2. Samuel , ii 24.
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